

**Depopulating the Political Sidelines: CBC News Online Forum and  
Public Spheres in Canada**

by

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who did the best they could with what they had and knew. Thanks, dad. Thanks, mom.

### **Abstract**

The subject of the Internet's potential to foster a public sphere has become a growing area of research in the social sciences in the last two decades. My research explores comments made by participants on the CBC News online politics forum during the May 2011 federal election in Canada. Based on conditions proposed by Jurgen Habermas in his concept of the public sphere and operationalized by Lincoln Dahlberg in his pioneering study of the Minnesota e-Democracy listserv, my thesis explores the potential for the CBC News online forum to foster a public sphere for Canadians. While examining the CBC News online forum against the criteria of the public sphere, I also interrogate Habermas' concept of a universal public sphere using the works of Nancy Fraser and other scholars, who argue for multiple public spheres.

## **Preface**

The concept of the public sphere is one of the first subjects that stuck with me as a Communications student at Brock University and I kept coming back to it. I find Jurgen Habermas' public sphere (and later communicative action) theory essential, especially for someone who considers dialogue a valuable tool in the political process. I grew up in an environment where people either spoke and were not heard, were hindered by privileged persons and prevented from speaking (especially in public), or paid dearly for voicing their opinions.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

- 1) CBC News = CBC News Politics Forum
- 2) IP# = Internet Protocol address
- 3) ISPs = Internet Service Providers
- 4) N = Quantitative
- 5) L = Qualitative
- 6) M = Moderated
- 7) A = Article
- 8) P = Page
- 9) # = Number

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Citizens' access to the public sphere is a subject of ongoing debate in academic circles and in the media. Political theorists, media researchers, and historiographers advocate for more accessible and diverse public spheres.<sup>1</sup> Feminist and political theorist, Nancy Fraser posits that the recognition of a multiplicity of arenas of discussion gives more citizens opportunities to engage in the political process.<sup>2</sup> Traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television, and radio) as arenas of political discussion have hitherto been considered the exclusive privilege of the bourgeoisie. Jurgen Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as a singular, metaphorical space in which citizens can deliberate about issues of general concern.<sup>3</sup> Habermas defines the public sphere as a

realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion<sup>4</sup> can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest.<sup>5</sup>

The advent of the Internet over the last two decades has arguably created more opportunities for citizens to engage in the political process. In the last few years, more individuals have been able to contribute to public discourse through online postings on electronic blogs, forums, and social media websites. Even traditional media organizations have embraced the Internet and most now encourage participation in discussions published on their websites.<sup>6</sup> Virtually every major newspaper, magazine, radio, and television station has weblogs and forums on their websites. Audiences are encouraged to use these tools for contributing to the discussion of news stories, television, and radio programs.

Information overload arguably hinders participation in online forums. People have a multiplicity of media messages constantly competing for their attention. It is thus no surprise that information that is freely available online is not necessarily accessed by those who would arguably benefit the most from it due to the simple fact that they may not be able to find it. This challenge brings into focus the need to reflect on which posts on these news websites are read, how the posts are chosen and, ultimately, whose opinions are privileged in the ongoing conversations found on media websites. My study explores the comments posted on the CBC News Politics section (CBC News) of the CBC.ca website during the 2011 federal election in Canada.

I am using this chapter to set out the public sphere and establish it in its nuanced version post-Habermas' initial conception. I then connect the concept to communication and public spheres in Canada in relation to social

justice and equity. This chapter establishes my view and understanding of public spheres. I use chapter two to review the ongoing debates about online forums and their potential to foster public spheres in nation-states.

### **Thesis**

My study investigates the CBC News online forum as an arena for political discussion in Canada. I am using the CBC News Politics section (CBC News) of the CBC.ca website for my research. I focus specifically on the potential of CBC News to contribute to, and help foster, a Habermasian public sphere in Canada. Taking into account Nancy Fraser's argument that there are multiple public spheres,<sup>7</sup> I approach new media as a communicative tool for political discussions that function as tools of deliberation<sup>8</sup> in the public sphere in a manner similar to that of traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. A critical look at the Internet suggests that it is potentially a channel that can be used by more people to participate in political discussions. Simultaneously, there is a possibility that the same groups of people using traditional media are also the ones using new media to engage in the discussions on these forums.

### **Central Research Questions**

These are the primary questions that I am using to guide my study of CBC News' potential to foster a public sphere for Canadians to discuss issues of general interest. Can CBC News foster a political public sphere in

Canada? Based on the six criteria of the public sphere advanced by Habermas, what elements of “discursive inclusion and equality” are present in the comments on the website? How do forum participants indicate intent of “reflexivity,” “ideal role taking,” and “sincerity”?<sup>9</sup> Is there civic engagement on the forum? Finally, can the civic engagement (if present) on the forum be construed as occurring in a public sphere?

### **The Six Criteria of the Public Sphere**

My analytical framework for assessing CBC News as a potential public sphere for Canadians is based upon the six criteria for a viable public sphere as developed by Lincoln Dahlberg based on Habermas’ theory. These six criteria are a distillation of Habermas’ pioneering work on the public sphere. The criteria have been operationalized by political and media researchers, most notably Lincoln Dahlberg. Dahlberg applied the six criteria to new media in his early and rather influential research concerning the Minnesota e-Democracy listserv. I will use Dahlberg’s model to frame my assessment of the CBC News forum. These criteria will be the structural guide for the data analysis in chapter three. The six criteria are:

- 1) **Autonomy from state and economic power.** Discourse must be based on the concerns of citizens as a public rather than driven by the media of money and administrative power that facilitate the operations of the market and state.
- 2) **Exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims.** Deliberation involves engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticizable – are open to critique rather than dogmatically asserted.

- 3) **Reflexivity.** Participants must critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.
- 4) **Ideal role taking.** Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the other's perspective. This requires a commitment to an ongoing dialogue with difference in which interlocutors respectfully listen to each other.
- 5) **Sincerity.** Each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information – including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires – as relevant to the particular problem under consideration.
- 6) **Discursive inclusion and equality.** Every participant affected by the validity claims under consideration is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever. Inclusion can be limited by inequalities from outside of discourse – by formal or informal restrictions to access. It can also be limited by inequalities within discourse, where some dominate discourse and others struggle to get their voices heard.<sup>10</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework: Jurgen Habermas and the Public Sphere**

My theoretical framework is informed by Jurgen Habermas' conceptualization of the political public sphere. Habermas proposes that the public sphere is a cross between the "private sphere" (the level of civil society dealing with the family, commodity exchange and social labour) and the "sphere of public authority" (which deals with the state, the ruling class, and other institutions of authority like religion, police, or the academy).<sup>11</sup> The ideal public sphere envisioned by Habermas is one that guarantees access to all citizens. It is important to note that even Habermas acknowledges that this is only an *ideal* since he did not suggest that any one state or nation could possibly fulfill all of the criteria he outlines.

The Habermasian public sphere connects the state with the people through public opinion.<sup>12</sup> In Habermas' model, public sphere discourse is focused on participatory democracy and the possibility of public opinion translating to political action. Gerard Hauser interprets the Habermasian public sphere as "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest, and where possible, to reach a common judgment."<sup>13</sup> Fraser considers the Habermasian model similar to "a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk."<sup>14</sup> For a space to fulfill the mandate of a discursive arena, it should be accessible to all the people who have a stake in the issues on the agenda. Ideally, the participants should also be equipped to make contributions to the conversations, vis-à-vis being literate, capable of using the tools of access, and able to afford the time needed to critically engage in the discussions.

In his pioneering essay on the public sphere, Habermas proposed the concept of the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed."<sup>15</sup> In this context, Habermas suggests that public opinion is not so much a 'given' as it is a collectively idealized goal of mediated interactions through the public sphere. This conceptualization presumes that all citizens would have the means of access to participate in deliberations in such an arena. Habermas also presents this concept of the public sphere as a singular, metaphorical space where all citizens can gather to discuss issues of common interest. A key feature of the

Habermasian public sphere is that citizens are able to participate in this metaphorical arena with no restrictions, “with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest.”<sup>16</sup>

Habermas acknowledges that such a public sphere requires communication tools. He identifies “newspapers and magazines, radio and television” as specific “means of transmitting information and influencing those who receive it” in this arena.<sup>17</sup> Habermas’ reference to ‘today’ in his pioneering essay attempts to model the public sphere of mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> century on a historical analysis of the public sphere’s emergence and development from the 1700s. In this model, he emphasizes pre-20<sup>th</sup> century events and practices. Today, new media tools such as the Internet and, perhaps, smart phones have been introduced as vital tools of communication in such an arena.

Habermas further distinguishes between the political public sphere and the literary public sphere but my research is concerned with the political public sphere (characterized by deliberations about state affairs) and this therefore places the literary public sphere beyond the purview of my project. Issues of common interest to citizens in a country like Canada would range from healthcare to education, childcare, (un)employment, border security, housing, and migration, to name but a few. Habermas argues, “the public sphere [is] a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.”<sup>18</sup> The discursive arena



is expected to feature “a) general accessibility, b) elimination of all privileges, and c) discovery of general norms and rational legitimizations.”<sup>19</sup> He considers these key elements of the public sphere to be liberating insofar as citizens are entitled to freely express their opinions via participation in general discussions with little or no regard for class, economic distinctions, or other barriers. Habermas traces his conceptualization to the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the time when citizens started gaining access to a common arena where they could discuss issues of common interest.<sup>20</sup>

Habermas argues that prior to the formation of political public spheres in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there existed a medieval public sphere that was automatically legitimated by the appearance of the feudal lord or the recognition of estates.<sup>21</sup> He saw these rulers as people relating with the citizens for their own personal interests as opposed to acting as the citizens’ representatives. Habermas identifies a historical break at this point in time. He characterizes this break as a shift in the practice of governance. However Habermas contests the issue of whether or not the goals of the Enlightenment – rational governance based on the collective establishment of democratic norms and values – are ‘true’ and/or achievable. Feudal lords, the church, and nobility characterized the medieval public sphere.<sup>22</sup> Habermas identifies a period of polarization as well that resulted in several changes to the status of these institutions. The association of religion with the individual private wills of people conferred the ‘private’ label on religion though the church remained a public institution. Habermas notes that the military and the

judiciary also became public institutions, following disputes over princely authority.<sup>23</sup> He notes further that

the nobility became the organs of public authority, parliament and the legal institutions; while those occupied in trades and professions insofar as they had already established urban corporations and territorial organizations, developed into a sphere of bourgeois society, which would stand apart from the state as a genuine area of private autonomy.<sup>24</sup>

The gradual emergence of the bourgeois class eroded the medieval public sphere. The label “public” acquired new meaning, becoming applicable to institutions, which were now administered by private individuals who hitherto could not hold “public” offices because they were not princely or of nobility. The collective term “society” refers to a private realm that emerged out of the foregoing polarizations that was occurring in Europe at that time. Society is viewed as a separate entity from the state. Habermas argues that “public discussion” emerged as a vital bond in the 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere.<sup>25</sup>

Habermas makes a further distinction between the liberal model of the public sphere and the public sphere of a social welfare state. The liberal model was based primarily on fundamental rights, with the assurance of “the society as a sphere of private autonomy and the restrictions of public authority to a few functions.”<sup>26</sup> These attempts to redefine private and public allowed private individuals to form public bodies and represent themselves before the state. Habermas posits that the bourgeoisie<sup>27</sup> took advantage of this opportunity to form public bodies and were able to represent themselves

effectively in state matters. In his review of tools of communication in the public sphere, he asserts that a more critical role was conferred on newspapers because they became the medium of choice for political parties. He identified the publisher of a newspaper as “a dealer in public opinion” and considered the press “an institution of the public” that functioned as a mediator between those who were speaking and their audiences.<sup>28</sup>

Notably, this liberal model of the public sphere is distinct from the social welfare state model, the emergence of which is traced to European civil unrest (especially in England and France), during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Habermas notes that the public body was no longer an exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie. The revolutions in England and France gave rise to a new class of citizens who could equally access the public sphere, even though they did not possess the elite education and purchasing power of the bourgeoisie. In the social welfare state model, the public sphere mediated citizens’ demands that had previously been considered private and not deserving of representation in the public. Social organizations and voluntary community groups sprang up to mediate some of the conflicts arising from the blurring of public and private matters in Europe at that time. The organizations liaised with political parties and public administrations, and made representations for citizens based on collective commercial and societal demands.<sup>29</sup>

Habermas observed that the social welfare state public sphere had some weaknesses insofar as it transitioned from engaging in public deliberation of issues that benefit the society to advocating on behalf of a select few. To

some extent, these social organizations became self-serving. They appear to be more beneficial to political parties through extended relations with bourgeois individuals, thereby relegating fundamental human rights in favour of representing a few “organized individuals.”<sup>30</sup> He concludes that the structural transformation of the public sphere served to destabilize rather than strengthen the public sphere. As a result of this observed destabilization, Habermas predicted that the public sphere assumed a modified role, functioning in an altered form through social and political organizations that challenge each other as well as the state.<sup>31</sup>

### **Critics of the Habermasian Public Sphere**

Nancy Fraser’s political-feminist revision of the public sphere exposed the gaps in Habermas’ initial conceptualization. Her work is specifically useful in recognizing the existence of and need for micro public spheres in nation-states. Fraser used the works of three historiographers to further nuance her arguments about the shortfalls in Habermas’ concept. These three historiographers, Joan Landes, Geoff Eley, and Mary P. Ryan, further reveal the constraints of Habermas’ envisioning of a universal public sphere, which they argue is a utopian ideal.

#### **Nancy Fraser**

Decades after Habermas’ conceptualization, Nancy Fraser interrogated some of the tenets of the Habermasian public sphere in her essay, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually

Existing Democracy.”<sup>32</sup> She uses Habermas’ concept of the public sphere to explore the liberal democratic system in the United States of America. Fraser states that Habermas’ public sphere “designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk.”<sup>33</sup> She clarifies that Habermas’ concept refers to a space – “an arena” – that is separate from the state or the economy. This space functions as a place for citizens to critique the state. Fraser also considers this a metaphorical space for “debating and deliberating” in the same fashion as Habermas.<sup>34</sup>

In her essay, Fraser discusses the critiques from three historiographers who nuance the public sphere debate further by exploring some arenas of discussion that were not acknowledged in Habermas’ conceptualization. The revisions of history by these authors show further gaps based on gender, class, and accessibility in Habermas’ concept of the public sphere. Through these authors’ works, Fraser points out the limitations in Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere, especially when juxtaposed with the real state of actually existing democracies. Particularly, Fraser reviewed the bourgeois public sphere<sup>35</sup> discussed by Habermas.

The bourgeois public sphere was historically limited to the formation of interest groups during the rise of the working class and the development of political activism in Europe. Fraser notes that the bourgeois public sphere functioned largely as a channel for citizens to challenge the state on matters of common interest. She takes Habermas to task, contrasting his conceptualization of the public sphere with ideas emerging from scholars in

revisionist historiography. Fraser notes three historiographers' observations that there were some exclusionary practices in the Habermasian model of the public sphere. My focus on the exclusion of women is not to say that they are excluded as a group from the CBC News forum. Rather it is to show that the example of excluded women and the working-class in the 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere is the vehicle by which I make the argument that Habermas' public sphere is limited and uni-focal.

### **Joan Landes**

The first author reviewed by Fraser is Joan Landes, who argues that women were excluded from the public sphere in France due to the masculine format of "the new republican public sphere."<sup>36</sup> Landes is a feminist historian whose revision of political theory draws on both real historical and artistic renditions of historical accounts of 18<sup>th</sup> century France. She argues that, "the bourgeois republic was constituted in and through a discourse on gender relations."<sup>37</sup> Through a critical reading of the film, *La nuit de Varennes* by Scola, Landes re-envisioned some of the uprisings during the French revolution, to make a case for a different public sphere from the one discussed by Habermas. She highlights the gap in Habermas' concept centered around the omission of analyses of certain participants and groups from the public sphere based on gender. Landes revisits the "gendered nature" of the polity and lays the groundwork for a debate about issues of class and gender disparities that were the fallout from the resistance to patriarchal rule.<sup>38</sup>

Landes argues that women represented themselves in politics and in the public during the Revolution. She traces this to a 1788 record that documents an electoral process in which both men and women were present. This record contrasts with Habermas' report that does not indicate the gendered nature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere. Landes writes about various women's groups making representations on behalf of their members and sometimes as opponents of other women's groups.

There were the "working women [who] protest the abrogation of their traditional rights in the new political economy," the Parisian "flower sellers [who] protest the disorder of the market" and "rebuke their unwelcome female competitors."<sup>39</sup> Landes discusses two other women's groups, "women of the Third Estate" and "fishwives" who also made representations before the king. Presumably, these groups would have had discussions and deliberated on their needs prior to seeking audience with the king and making a case as a collective.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Landes advises that women's participation in the protests at Versailles was connected to an extended practice of their role and visibility in public affairs. She makes extensive reference to the Versailles uprising and the October Days. In Landes' account, journalists represented these women in some of their news reports. She suggests that, "women were being cast as heroines and inspirational symbols, but they were less apt to be counted as people with strong political interests."<sup>41</sup> Landes disputes Habermas' reading of the European 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere as a liberal and bourgeois

privilege. She notes that these accounts are not accurate historical representations.

The gap Landes sees in Habermas' concept is that it omits any representation of women's gathering, deliberation, and resultant action in the time period of the rise of the liberal public sphere.<sup>42</sup> Landes presents her work as a "*reconstruction* of public sphere theory from the vantage points of women and feminism."<sup>43</sup> For instance, she suggests that the salon was "an alternative sphere of cultural production inside absolutism" and it had a "pronounced feminine character."<sup>44</sup> Women used these salons for group gatherings and deliberations on issues of general interest – albeit not as much as men – in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition, Landes reviewed Habermas' account of absolutist regimes, the concept of informed public opinion, and the demand for publication of proceedings in the judiciary and the legislature.<sup>45</sup> She notes that the production of public opinion is the tangible result of the gathering of private individuals discussing public matters or diverse matters in public.<sup>46</sup> Landes' discussion of the oversights in Habermas' concept of the public sphere serves to showcase women's work in public life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Landes' arguments show that through the interactions in salons, women did indeed form public opinions and these opinions translated into action, key examples of which include the role of women in the French revolution as well as the self-representation women groups made before the king.



### **Geoff Eley**

Political historiographer, Geoff Eley's work extends Landes' argument by positing that the exclusion of women was not limited to France but extended to the liberal public spheres of England and Germany. Eley exposes how exclusion based on gender and class intersects. The three key issues emerging from the critique mounted by these revisionist historiographers focused specifically on the intersections of gender, class, and accessibility. Eley's work addresses two of these three issues extensively. For the republican public sphere, it was gender; for the liberal public sphere, class was added to gender. Accessibility was a major challenge in the earlier public spheres of England and Germany. Rather than accommodating the opinions of all citizens, the public sphere gradually morphed into the domain of bourgeois men seeking opportunities to govern the state. These men were not open to accommodating women or working-class men.

Eley points out that Habermas' goal in his theory of the public sphere was to set up conditions and criteria based on which emerging public spheres can be judged, as opposed to assessing the effectiveness of existing public sphere(s) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> In discussing Habermas' omissions, Eley argues that some of the factors identified by Habermas as pertinent to the public sphere have also been the reasons that have resulted in the erosion of the demarcation between private and public life. Capitalism, the states' attempts to control social conflicts, and fragmentation of the rational public

have all contributed to the changes that occurred in the public sphere in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup>

Eley states that, “voluntary association was a key factor in Germany’s 18<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois public sphere.”<sup>49</sup> The gathering of the select elites (bourgeoisies) served to signal to the monarchy or absolutist government that the members of these associations formed groups parallel to the reigning government. However, these groups were parallel to the “self-conscious middle-class public” that also emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even though the latter group was not given as much publicity or recognition as the bourgeoisie.<sup>50</sup>

According to Eley, Habermas focuses too heavily on the bourgeoisie public sphere and this comes at the expense of addressing other groups of people that were gathering and making public representations in the same timeframe.<sup>51</sup> Eley insists that the public sphere was not an exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie. He notes that there were other groups besides the bourgeoisie engaging in concrete debates about issues of common interest. Notably, “peasants and working-class voices [strived] for the same emancipatory language.”<sup>52</sup> Eley argues that these other groups may indeed be a “derivative of the liberal model,” as advanced by Habermas, but also suggests that they are nonetheless parallel groups to the bourgeoisie in the sense that they also organized themselves as groups to make representations on their own behalf.<sup>53</sup>

Eley argues that, “it is important to acknowledge the existence of competing publics – not just later in the nineteenth century when Habermas presents the fragmentation of the classical liberal model of *Oeffentlichkeit* [the public sphere], but at every stage in the history of the public sphere and indeed from the very beginning.”<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Eley notes that in not acknowledging other publics, Habermas omits the diversity that was present in that time period and also the fact that there were always divergent views in the public sphere.

Eley’s conception of the public sphere is more encompassing and covers a wider range of groups than Habermas’ exclusive attention to the bourgeois variation of the public sphere. I agree with Eley that, “the public sphere makes more sense as the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place, rather than as the spontaneous and class-specific achievement of the bourgeoisie in some sufficient sense.”<sup>55</sup> For instance, the Jacobian radicals, a new group of intellectuals that could be placed between the bourgeoisie and the plebeians, formed new advocacy groups aimed at co-opting the plebeians into an advocating collective whose voices were reflected not in “riots, revelry, and rough music”, but by “the political modalities of the pamphlet, committee room, resolution and petition, supplemented where necessary by the disciplined democracy of an orderly open-air demonstration.”<sup>56</sup>

Eley concludes, “the actual pursuit of communicative rationality via the modalities of the public sphere at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reveals a far

richer social history than Habermas' conception of a specifically bourgeois emancipation allows."<sup>57</sup> Eley points out an enduring exclusionary practice that was based on gender. This aligns with Fraser's, Landes', and as one will soon see below, Ryan's observations of Habermas' omission of women's participation in the public sphere. Eley notes that the silencing of women's voices during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was partly a function of the distinctions between public and private spheres.

This silencing functioned as a way to exclude women from public life or records of happenstances in public spaces, as captured in the media, even though women were a part of the growing resistance to monarchical rule and feudal practices. Through Landes' and Eley's accounts, Fraser points out the contradictions in what Habermas' public sphere aspired to and what it actually became. She suggests that a practice of exclusivity emerged from its attempt to be inclusive.<sup>58</sup> Fraser notes that in failing to acknowledge other public spheres that were equally in existence, Habermas idealizes the liberal public sphere, thus making it exclusionary.

### **Mary P. Ryan**

Feminist historiographer, Mary P. Ryan is the third historiographer whose work Fraser consults in her review of Habermas. Ryan examines how in 19<sup>th</sup> century North America, women were ingenious in devising ways to access public political life. Ryan argues that different strata of women used diverse means to express their opinions. These opinions eventually found their way to the *official* public sphere dominated by bourgeois males. Ryan

argues, “Habermas privileges the deliberative aspect of the public [and] its capacity to bring citizens together to rationally discuss, and reach a consensus about the general good.”<sup>59</sup> Ryan examined early 19<sup>th</sup> century America (represented by New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco) to challenge Habermas’ claim that the public sphere could be accessed by anyone or that it was the exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie. She also notes, “at the very least, any construction of the public sphere must acknowledge and account for the historical exclusion of women and gender issues.”<sup>60</sup>

Ryan records that public spaces were generally considered off-limits for women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In so many ways, there was a distinct separation of the public and the private spheres. The home was gendered as a private women’s space while public spaces like newly emerging theatres were considered a space for men.<sup>61</sup> In spite of the attempt at a clear distinction between these two spaces, Ryan observes the quest by some businessmen in mid-1800s to cater to women’s needs. These businesses set up fashion stores, restaurants, theatres, and even gambling houses. Most of these enterprises offered separate entrances for women to have their own space apart from men. Libraries and city transport systems would also join these enterprises in making provisions to include women as their clients.

However, Ryan also documents that in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans, women made protests and comments in public that were considered inflammatory enough as to warrant attention from the parliament in Great Britain.<sup>62</sup> Ryan argues, “transferred to America, the public sphere seems to

have been slightly longer-lived as well as more pluralistic than it was in Western Europe.”<sup>63</sup> She concludes that, “men as well as women, elites as well as the marginal, held genuine agency if unequal power in the public arena.”<sup>64</sup> In this context, she rejects Habermas’ conception of a singular public sphere featuring bourgeois male interlocutors.

For Fraser, Ryan’s account aids in dismantling the idea that women did not have access to the public sphere. This is because Fraser considers the universal, idealized liberal public sphere discussed by Habermas to be “class- and gender-biased.”<sup>65</sup> Due to the fact that Habermas’ model only examined *the* public sphere as singular (excluding other existing public spheres that were constituted by women and the working-class), there was no visibility or representation of competing opinions or groups in the public, hence these other groups were deemed nonexistent. Fraser further makes the connection that the conception of Habermas’ public sphere was not only utopian but “also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule” in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe.<sup>66</sup>

Based on the foregoing discussion, one sees that Landes’, Eley’s, and Ryan’s historical accounts of the public sphere add nuance to Habermas’ interpretations of a universal and singular public sphere. Fraser identifies four assumptions that undergird Habermas’ utopian conception of the public sphere.<sup>67</sup> Habermas’ concept calls for autonomy from state and economic power; exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims; reflexivity; ideal role taking; sincerity; and discursive inclusion and equality.

Fraser notes that openness and accessibility, two of the six criteria in Habermas' concept, were not achieved in the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas and historical revisionists attest to Fraser's position, as seen in historical accounts but also in Habermas' later work.<sup>68</sup> Fraser argues, "women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation on the basis of gender status, while plebeian men were formally excluded by property qualifications. Moreover, in many cases women and men of racialized ethnicities of all classes were excluded on racial grounds."<sup>69</sup> These exclusions problematized the assumption that the space espoused by Habermas could be accessed by citizens who would shed their differences in favour of attaining consensus on issues of common interest.

Fraser argues that rather than being eliminated, the social inequalities of participants were bracketed.<sup>70</sup> In this context, inequalities based on birth and fortune would be set aside while participants are presumed to be equal. These bracketed inequalities were like masks that participants put on and took off to serve their individual purposes. These loosely bracketed inequalities made discursive interaction, one of Habermas' six criteria of the public sphere, unattainable, since women and plebeian classes could not participate equally with the upper-class in the bourgeois public sphere. Fraser's contemporary example cites feminist research, specifically feminist political theory that suggests that unequal participation, based on gender, for instance, masks a deeper problem in which deliberative interaction among the sexes often results in men wielding control over women.

In reviewing Habermas' criteria, Fraser points out that in the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, its aim to be "open and accessible to all" turned out to be an utopian ideal because it was not attained.<sup>71</sup> I find Fraser's position instructive for my analysis of the CBC News' potential to foster a public sphere for Canadians. Can the CBC fulfill the criteria of openness and accessibility in modern-day democratic public spheres in Canada? To address the conditions of openness and accessibility, Fraser then proposes the "thematizing" rather than "bracketing" of social inequalities, so that these inequalities can themselves become topics for deliberation in the public sphere.<sup>72</sup>

She notes that this thematizing has come up in Habermas' more recent works on communicative ethics. There is also the faulty issue of a "zero degree culture" assumption by the bourgeoisie, in relation to the bracketing of inequalities.<sup>73</sup> This assumption is considered false since it was connected to the bracketing of inequalities as well. Moreover, subordinated and marginalized groups could not access "means of equal participation" since they have to prioritize primary needs like food and shelter over luxuries.<sup>74</sup> This is a germane issue that philosopher Brian Barry discusses in detail in his argument for a theory of social justice, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Fraser speaks to this issue of bracketing of equalities in clearer terms, saying, "the weight of circumstance suggests that to have a public sphere in which interlocutors can deliberate as peers, it is not sufficient merely to bracket social inequality. Instead, a necessary condition for participatory



parity is that systemic social inequalities be eliminated.”<sup>75</sup> This statement by Fraser can be linked to Barry’s theory of social justice, though it is mainly a direct challenge of one of Habermas’ six conditions of the public sphere, i.e. accessibility.

Fraser concludes, “political democracy requires substantive social equality.”<sup>76</sup> She briefly addresses the issue of polarization of the public sphere that appeared in Habermas’ earlier literature, which points to a singular form of public sphere. Towards the end of that essay, Habermas indicated a concern that emerging new public spheres in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were a sign of “fragmentation and decline” of the universal public sphere.<sup>77</sup> Fraser disagrees with Habermas on this idea of polarization and also on the requirement that there needs to be a separation between state and society in order for a public sphere to function effectively or attain legitimacy.

She states, “a sharp separation of (economic) civil society and the state is not a necessary condition for a well-functioning public sphere.”<sup>78</sup> This position by Fraser connects to the first condition of the public sphere that requires the metaphorical space to be free of connection to the state or economic power. As a public broadcaster, although the CBC is at arm’s length from the government, the public funding it receives and its additional reliance on advertising revenue problematizes the CBC’s potential to fully be autonomous.

Fraser’s relevance to my work is reflected in CBC News’ potential to foster an online public sphere – a metaphorical discursive arena and/or space

– in the same fashion as a television, radio station, newspaper, or magazine. The network's status as a publicly funded media organization could make it ineligible to fulfill this role, if placed solely against Habermas' criteria. Moreover, the perceived masculine voices on the topics in some of the forums on the CBC News website could be construed as a deterrent to the voices of marginalized groups in the country.

These marginalized Canadians are already sparsely represented in political discussions in mainstream media.<sup>79</sup> Marginalized groups are often constrained by multiple factors, including economic, technological, and educational. Moreover, some people may argue that online forum participants are largely some of the same voices one hears on television and radio or read in newspapers and magazines and that they have just transformed themselves to fit the model offered by the Internet. However, participation in political deliberations through the use of new media, regardless of who the participants are, can arguably make a case for the broadening of public spheres in Canada.

These critics of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere open up the discussion for assessing other arenas of public discussion and the potential of these arenas to be equally considered as public spheres. Regardless of their link to government or the economy, several political, religious, social and/or other groups, including individuals coming together with no overt affiliation to a group, can have their deliberations assessed as discussions that form parts of a larger and broader public sphere. This

position revises the initial reasoning that suggests a singular, universal bourgeois public sphere devoid of government or corporate economic influence.

### **Communication and Public Spheres in Canada**

There are many vibrant arenas of political discussion in Canada, including state-sponsored, citizen-initiated, and privately owned outlets. To explore this diversity, a brief history of communication in Canada will aid in setting up the current media climate. This historical account forms the basis of why communication should be addressed as a social justice issue in the country. Canada's identity crisis is a major challenge that shows in the structure and function of the media in Canada. A general mandate of most, if not all media establishments in Canada, is to work towards reaching Canadians as a collective, although the English-French language divide, regional disparities, and the challenges of multiculturalism continue to make national reach a herculean task. Since 1977, CBC radio and television have boosted their efforts at reaching English- and French-speaking audiences in Canada. Several attempts have been made to foster equal representation and programming in both languages.<sup>80</sup> These efforts at nation building have been hampered by budget cuts beginning in the 1990s and the hostility of private broadcasters towards the CBC's access to public funding.<sup>81</sup> As a crown corporation, the CBC has a mandate to represent all Canadians and project Canadian identity to all citizens.

Politics and media communications scholar, Arthur Siegel presents the media as organizations that mediate communication between people and the state, economy, politics, and the international community. He focuses specifically on traditional media in his work that examines media and politics. Arguably most of the inferences Siegel makes are applicable to the media's websites as well, since most media organizations' websites are extensions of their traditional forms. There is only but a fledgling amount of online-only media in Canada (*Open Media*, for example)<sup>82</sup> and few, if any, exist in the mainstream media diet of most Canadians.

A limitation of traditional media is the one-way flow of communication that often results in a lack of feedback or delayed response from the audience. Hitherto, the audiences' response to media would be to "write, telephone, send a fax, or use e-mail to indicate their reactions."<sup>83</sup> This limitation is gradually being displaced by the allowance of online interactivity for an update in real time. This interactivity could be constrained by forum-imposed mediation, although audiences are still allowed to make instant comments on the stories they read. Some of these comments are then selected for transmission on the news broadcasts of the media organizations.

Siegel argues, "Canada is the most communication-conscious country in the world."<sup>84</sup> He lists four challenges facing mass media in Canada as "geographic factors, population distribution, the proximity of the United States, and linguistic and cultural duality [plurality] in a multicultural setting."<sup>85</sup> He notes that two measures have been deployed to address these

challenges. These measures are technology and government legislation. These challenges are reflected in the Multiculturalism Act, need for unity among diverse groups of people, two official languages, threat of secession by Quebec, large landmass (with people in remote areas and large numbers of inhabitants concentrated in few large metropolises), and the threat of cultural colonization (or Americanization) of Canadian media.

Siegel suggests that, “Canadians view the world largely through American eyes.”<sup>86</sup> This is likely due to the proximity of Canada to the United States but also the volume of American culture consumed by Canadians through the challenge of unidirectional media saturation that has been aided by the geographic and economic closeness between the two countries. A large percentage of Canadians live along the border with the United States and this exposes Canadians to perhaps an excessive amount of American culture and cultural products, including newspapers, magazines, radio, and television programming.

In discussing the issue of linguistic and cultural plurality, Siegel observes that Francophone and Anglophone Canadians get different reports of political happenings in the country.<sup>87</sup> Siegel’s detailed history of media in Canada traces it from the era of newspaper to radio and then television. He notes that the electronic media, i.e. radio and television, was promoted as the solution to the problem of reaching a mass audience in such a huge landmass as Canada. Until the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post*, Canada did not have a newspaper or magazine with a national reach.<sup>88</sup> Broadcasting media has

been able to overcome the limitation faced by newspapers in that broadcasting truly has a national reach through radio and television.<sup>89</sup> The Internet serves as a new media tool to build on this national reach attained by radio and television.

David Taras has written extensively about communication in Canada.<sup>90</sup> In his chapter on “Media, Citizens, and Democracy,” Taras argues that, “the notion at the heart of the democratic ideal is that ‘the people’ have an intrinsic sense of what is right and wrong, and that they can be trusted to make wise judgments based on their instinctive feelings and real-life experiences.”<sup>91</sup> For Taras, communication and democracy are intrinsically linked just as journalists and politics are connected. He discusses four models of public opinion formation in Canada, how the media features in the opinion formation loop, and ways in which these opinions translate to action in politics. Taras highlights media’s critical role in public opinion formation but also points out concerns about the challenges facing the media as well as the ruptures in the Canadian democratic process. He firmly asserts that the media have an effect in the formation of public opinion in Canada.

The first model of public opinion formation suggests that citizens (the public) are not knowledgeable enough to influence public policy enacted by the government. This feeds off early media studies’ “hypodermic needle” theory that suggests media audiences are passive, gullible, and easily ‘acted upon’ by the media they consume. The perspective, which is based largely on direct effects’ studies of earlier media researchers like Paul Lazarsfeld and

Walter Lippmann, privileges the opinion of elites, those who were elected to govern the people, as the harbingers of knowledge and expertise. Citizens' disenchantment with the political process and their lack of knowledge of the political process confirms the viability of this perspective. Some other media scholars, including Todd Gitlin, Bill McKibben, and Jonathan Schell, also argue for this model of public opinion formation.<sup>92</sup> Television, the way citizens use it, as well as media ownership structure in Canada is further blamed for this disconnect.

The second model discussed by Taras is the view of citizens as active audiences, the exact opposite of the first model. This relies on uses and gratifications theory, arguing that audiences do make conscious decisions in their media diet and by extension, can make effective contributions to public opinion formation in Canada. A key argument of proponents of this model is that "audiences are capable of sifting through the media clutter, actively asserting, [and] actively "constructing" their own meanings."<sup>93</sup> This is similar to Stuart Hall's models of dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings in which he suggests that when audiences are confronted with media messages, they apply a dominant, negotiated, or oppositional reading to them.<sup>94</sup> In each of these three readings, the audience is actively using his/her resources to interact with the media messages. Taras argues further that, "while citizens may know little about the political system and how it operates, they use "shortcuts," "cues," and instinctive "feel" to make judgments about political leaders and the policies they advocate."<sup>95</sup>

The third model discussed by Taras is the “constructionist” view, which suggests that politicians know the pulse of the citizens and they structure their campaigns based on this knowledge.<sup>96</sup> This view also suggests that politicians, rather than journalists, set the agenda in public opinion formation. The fourth model also privileges citizens’ ability to make informed decisions based on them actively seeking information through diverse and multiple sources that are available to them through communication channels.

While Taras’ review of Canadian media tend to focus on the political underpinnings and how the media and politicians perceive audiences, Siegel gives a more detailed account of Canada’s communication landscape. Siegel states that Canada’s national television system started in 1949 while the CBC commenced television broadcasting in 1952. As of its inception, “the mandate for the public sector of broadcasting, for example, speaks of the public-interest, laudably fostering a sense of Canadian identity and promoting regional interaction.”<sup>97</sup> As one of the two measures aimed at fighting the four challenges facing Canada’s mass media, legislation was mostly aimed at achieving the end goal of nation building through the use of media communication. Five broadcasting acts were passed between 1931 and 1991. An important feature of the reason for establishing the CBC was to “strengthen the arm’s-length relationship between broadcasting and the political system.”<sup>98</sup> The importance of the task of nation building is reflected in the way the mass media embraced technological advancements at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The transcontinental railway played a huge role in



performing this task but it was not sufficient. Quick movement and dissemination of information was also required to further this goal of nation building.<sup>99</sup>

A function of the media, which holds key relevance to my study, is its ability to set an agenda for the audience. Bernard Cohen argues, “[the media] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about.”<sup>100</sup> Siegel considers this agenda-setting function of the media as having a high relevance in a country’s political life. Taras alludes to the function of the media as agenda-setters as well, although he also suggests that politicians are agenda-setters too.<sup>101</sup> Siegel notes the “symbiotic” ability to influence, possessed by the media on the one hand and the political, social and economic realms on the other.<sup>102</sup> He argues, “by focusing attention on particular events and ignoring others, the media help define the political issues of the day and to determine the relevance of politics for the individual.”<sup>103</sup> This is a vital function that connects to citizens’ contributions to stories on media forums and weblogs. Siegel posits, “both private and public broadcasting have failed to make meaningful contributions to either cross-regional or cross-cultural interactions.”<sup>104</sup> This statement creates a challenge for new media, for example, the Internet, as a potential tool for bridging the gap between citizens and also connecting the citizens in a common space to engage each other on issues of general concern.

Siegel suggests, “the mass media is an integral part of the political process in democratic societies. So intertwined are politics and the media that significant changes in one have profound implications for the other.”<sup>105</sup> In this context, he is focused on the relationship between the media, the political system and politicians. Siegel does not say much about the citizens and/or audience dynamic in this relationship. There is a triangular relationship that exists between the media, politicians, and audiences. This relationship needs to be explored for a better understanding of how these three groups function and interact with each other. Online forums like the CBC News have the potential to open up more opportunities for this triangular relationship to develop further. Although towards the end of his book, Siegel sounds a dire warning that the advent of new technologies rather than helping to bring Canadians together, could actually result in further pulling the citizens apart. In perhaps the most compelling argument for why media needs to have a national reach, Siegel states, “Canadians need to know more about each other and about their politics and their society to make informed decisions touching the country’s future.”<sup>106</sup> This need to know and also to be a part of decision making is partly what drives my interest in the subject I am exploring in my research.

## **Theorizing Social Justice and Equity: Brian Barry, Marc Raboy and Jeremy Shtern**

Why social justice and equity? What connects these two concepts to communication? What elements of a person's life affect the person's ability or lack thereof to engage in deliberations about issues of local, regional, or national relevance? Why does one need to address the challenges of communication or *communicating* as a social justice issue? For answers to these questions, I look to social justice theorist, Brian Barry, whose concept of equality of opportunity proposes that a society first pays attention to the least advantaged in its midst.<sup>107</sup> He argues that citizens in most developed countries are divided based on certain measures of inequality, including wage gaps, gender, and position. Barry is opposed to the accumulation of wealth based on hierarchical social positioning. He notes that all citizens do not have equal purchasing power since some have to sell their time for money. For Barry, the privatization of social goods limits access to basic needs like food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Barry visualizes the possibility of allowing all citizens to access the same opportunities, though it is clear that the odds are stacked against those who have to sell their labour in order to afford these basic needs. Fraser's call for the thematizing, rather than bracketing, of inequalities connects to Barry's position.<sup>108</sup>

Barry traces the move in political reasoning from justice based on individual conscience to collective institutional justice. His position on why we need a theory of social justice and his concept of equality of opportunity

foregrounds the obstacles that confront citizens' ability to participate in debates about politics, among other challenges that citizens face as a result of their lack of basic needs and skills.<sup>109</sup> Barry berates the tendency of most liberal, democratic, and labour party movements to shy away from the *socialist* label because it is assumed that it will hinder their political aspirations. Even though most of the members of these parties acknowledge the importance of meeting people's basic needs, which is at the root of social justice and equity, the politicians would still rather be called anything but advocates of socialism.

Barry posits that, "social justice is, and is normally understood to be, a question of equal opportunities."<sup>110</sup> He begins his discussion of why we need a theory of social justice by noting that the individual effects of social injustice can be traced back to the pre-conception of a child. In very early years, Barry notes, children who attend expensive private schools have a competitive advantage in the labour market.<sup>111</sup> He presents this as a social justice issue that accounts for why some people may never rise above the poverty line in their lives. This social justice issue is inherently linked to class as a primary social category of exclusion and inequality. Barry's argument is similar to Landes' and Eley's revisions suggesting that class was used as an exclusionary organizing category in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Barry argues that inequalities have overlapping layers, including economic, social, and educational. He argues, "morally arbitrary inequalities begin before inception."<sup>112</sup> He discusses generational inequalities that are

connected to the families into which people are born. His work is focused on “social injustice within [Western] countries.”<sup>113</sup> Barry highlights these issues as they obtain mostly in Britain and America, though I would argue that some of these issues also plague Canada. His inquiry has relevance for my study because it gives a glimpse of why people in Western societies may be constrained in accessing arenas of public discussion like the CBC News forum. Without adequate knowledge of the country’s political process, the technological means to access discussion forums, or the language proficiency to participate in deliberations on political discussion forums, most Canadians are not able to engage in the process of governance.

Barry invokes Dickens’ novel, *Hard Times*, as an example of how the bane of capitalism has been documented and how attempts to expose its ills have worked in literature through the centuries. He notes however that in most 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, issues of inequalities and injustice arising from the capitalist system have never been of concern to the rich merely because they choose to address it as a societal ill but more because they are obliged by law to do so.<sup>114</sup> In this context, Barry argues that the rich do not act to erase inequality because they are altruistic but more because they are compelled. Barry claims to offer the “*rationale*” by which less privileged people can demand basic rights, opportunities, and resources that are due to them.<sup>115</sup>

One of Barry’s basic arguments is that “a job is a scarce resource.”<sup>116</sup> In this regard, he brings up affirmative action, which is about giving a job to

someone because they have faced great hardship to qualify for it. He also discusses “[job] interviews as a form of class discrimination,” which often works to doubly disadvantage those who have already been victimized based on lack of access to basic opportunities.<sup>117</sup> However, the two key concepts of Barry’s theory of social justice that hold the most relevance for my inquiry are, “a starting gate” and “cumulative advantage and disadvantage.”<sup>118</sup>

Barry’s concept of “a starting gate” is instructive in discussing Habermas’ two criteria of reflexivity as well as discursive inclusion and inequality. Barry uses a horse race analogy to discuss how people access opportunities. He suggests that the advantages and disadvantages one starts with as a child often affect where one is likely to end up in society, vis-à-vis social class, income bracket, education, and employment opportunities, among others.

Barry makes two points in this regard. First, “the efforts that get some of the biggest rewards may not be particularly virtuous.”<sup>119</sup> Contextually, Barry argues that the incessant corporate white-collar crimes that go unpunished discourage less privileged people, who are already disadvantaged in terms of access to employment opportunities, from seeing ‘hard work’ as a worthwhile pursuit. Secondly, Barry says, “wherever we put the starting gate, the different resources that people bring to it are liable to overwhelm the significance of the differential use they may make of those resources.”<sup>120</sup>

This relates to the advantages or disadvantages a child is born into and their influence in that child’s life as it grows into an adult. In discussing these issues, Barry is careful to point out that there are quite a few factors to

consider in determining whether or not equal opportunity is available to all. However, in exploring multiple examples and scenarios, he comes to the conclusion that “if we are ever to employ the concept of equal opportunity there has to be a limit to the amount of fine-grained detail we consider relevant in order to declare that two people had equal opportunities.”<sup>121</sup>

In thinking through citizens’ ability to critically engage in political deliberations in an online forum, one has to consider access to a computer, Internet use literacy, cost of Internet connectivity, and the affordability of the time to invest in such forums. I would argue that these are not “fine-grained detail” in the context that Barry argues above, but rather basic necessities that are essential for citizen engagement in governance. People who would otherwise engage in political deliberations may not be doing so because of several layers of victimization and inequality.

Interestingly, some people have all the necessary tools yet choose not to engage in political deliberations for other reasons. However, it is essential that all citizens have the means of access. What they then do with this means is entirely up to them. This is similar to an individual’s right to vote in political elections. As it has become apparent, the fact that people have the right to vote does not mean that they always exercise that right. For Barry, “approximate material equality is a necessary condition of a socially just society; so the spread of unequal rewards must be contained.”<sup>122</sup> Though he does not really offer solutions here for curbing these unequal rewards, the

acknowledgement of this problem in and of itself poses a challenge to the political process.

The second concept, cumulative advantage and disadvantage, suggests, “initial inequalities typically give rise to further inequalities.”<sup>123</sup> Arguably, if someone is already disadvantaged (for instance, no education, unemployed, no income) how can that person access opportunity like engaging in debates on a discursive arena such as CBC News? Barry posits, “a just system would have to give people second (or more) chances, so that losing out at the beginning does not permanently close doors that might be opened by extra effort later.”<sup>124</sup> This statement ties the second concept to the first one. Barry argues that this is an area in which Western formations have failed because they rarely extend this kind of second chance to their citizens. As stated earlier, the challenges of cumulative advantage and disadvantage start from when a child is conceived. For instance, a malnourished mother is linked to the outcome of a child’s performance in life.<sup>125</sup> He cites a study from New York that makes a connection between birth defects and IQ. Barry argues that poverty often weakens the poor such that they cannot represent themselves effectively and/or collectively in political matters.<sup>126</sup> How can this trend be reversed? How does one ensure that policies that are being made for citizens of a country have contributions from all stakeholders, especially marginalized people like the poor?

Barry’s conception of social justice and equity brings into focus the issue of the “right to communicate” as explored by Marc Raboy and Jeremy



Shtern.<sup>127</sup> Raboy and Shtern discuss the issue of access to communication and how this connects to the problem of the digital divide in Canada. The authors highlight the challenges and the probable solutions that can assist in giving Canadians universal communication access. “Access to the means of communication; access to knowledge; ... minority cultural and linguistic rights; [and] a right to self-determination and to take part in government” are some of the essential rights that connect directly to the aspiration for equitable treatment of all citizens.<sup>128</sup> Raboy and Shtern suggest that in the six decades that universal communication rights have evolved globally, these rights have essentially been adopted as Canadian communication rights and by extension linked to “human rights promised to all Canadians.”<sup>129</sup> They reviewed Canadian communication policies to explicate their intricacies and show how they have worked (or not) in ensuring communication rights for Canadians.

In attempts to provide access to the means of communication in Canada, both the government and private corporations have been instrumental in securing and providing the essential technology and policy instruments.<sup>130</sup> Raboy and Shtern argue however that where the country falls short is in capacity building for individuals and communities to use these technologies. They suggest that,

Proactive steps have been taken to extend the principle of universal access both across existing and onto emerging technical platforms for communication [though] where access to relevant media in Canada is less than universal, it tends to be the already marginalized (poor, isolated, disabled, and so on) who go without.<sup>131</sup>

The digital divide is essentially a social divide, hence there is a need to close the gaps in areas like income and education in order to ensure that access to the means of communication is indeed universal.<sup>132</sup> A key challenge of universal access is the cost of attaining such in a landmass like Canada's. For instance, the CBC proposed to suspend its free over-the-air transmission, which many small Canadian communities rely on, because the public broadcaster argued that it is more expensive to sustain than providing its transmission via cable or satellite.

As part of ensuring access to knowledge for Canadians, Raboy and Shtern propose that, "open access should be a policy priority" so that Canadians have access to educational materials, especially those that are produced through public funding.<sup>133</sup> The authors argue that, "affordable access to the various means of sharing knowledge is not equitably distributed across all groups in society," and this is especially a challenge for Northern Canada.<sup>134</sup> Government involvement in Internet access for Canadians has mostly focused on "augmenting penetration rates and have neglected to make skills training a funding condition or priority."<sup>135</sup> There is a pressing need for the government to enact and implement policies that will ensure every Canadian have access to the knowledge needed for making use of the technological penetration Canada has made in various communities across the country.

Additionally, by privileging provision of services in English and French languages, the universality of communication rights in Canada becomes contentious because groups like the “Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, and other cultural communities” do not get a chance to be fairly represented or served.<sup>136</sup> Raboy and Shtern consider minority cultural and linguistic rights an essential part of communication rights in Canada. They argue that media practitioners in Canada need to improve on serving minority communities and explore ways of representing them that is less objectifying, patronizing, and voyeuristic.

In discussing citizens’ right to self-determination and to be a part of how they are governed, Raboy and Shtern suggest that the Canadian government needs to give citizens more opportunities to participate in the process of policy formation. There is a need for citizens to be more involved in government and the means of involvement needs to be open and accessible to all Canadians.<sup>137</sup> The authors call for “increased recognition and integration of nongovernmental and community groups in the policy process.”<sup>138</sup> Individual citizens as well as formal and informal community groups should have opportunities to be involved in the discussions about communication rights policies. This form of inclusion will aid in forming policies that primarily feature the interests of those being governed.

## Chapter Conclusion

So far, I have outlined the concept of a universal public sphere as advanced by Jurgen Habermas and the concept of multiple public spheres advocated by some of Habermas' critics, notably Nancy Fraser, Joan Landes, Geoff Eley, and Mary P. Ryan. An outline of the six criteria of the public sphere has been provided. I have conducted a brief review of the Canadian communication landscape to highlight the challenges encountered in fostering a public sphere in the country. This review also aids in understanding how and why public spheres may function differently in Canada compared to European countries or the United States of America. I have also discussed why one should make communication a social justice issue and in doing this, I made connections to the concepts advanced by social justice theorist, Brian Barry, as well as communications scholars, Marc Raboy and Jeremy Shtern.

In conducting the theoretical mapping of the public sphere and also the criticism of Habermas' conceptualization, my aim has been to show that as far back as Habermas' record of the emergence of the public sphere in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was indeed a multiplicity of public spheres rather than just one public sphere that was controlled by the bourgeoisie. In addition, Fraser's argument that one does not need a complete separation of economic and state apparatuses to ensure a valid public arena of discourse prepares the groundwork for the potential argument to be made that CBC News can foster a public sphere for Canadians even though it is primarily a government-

funded media enterprise. This mapping exercise additionally assists in setting the groundwork for examining the possibility of CBC News, an electronic online arena, facilitating a public sphere in the same capacity that a newspaper or coffee house could have fulfilled the same function in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109–142.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 49–55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 49. "Public opinion is the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally – and in periodic elections, formally as well – practice vis-à-vis the ruling structure organized in the form of a state."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> The term "audiences" is employed broadly to refer to the users of print and electronic media.

<sup>7</sup> See Fraser's argument for multiple public spheres in Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation," *Political Communication* 22, (2005): 156. "The idea of deliberation points to the procedures of open discussion aimed at achieving rationally motivated consensus."

<sup>9</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg, "Extending the Public Sphere through Cyberspace: The Case of Minnesota E-Democracy," *First Monday* 6, no. 3, 2001, accessed on November 1, 2010, <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/838/747>.

<sup>10</sup> Dahlberg, "Extending the Public Sphere through Cyberspace," 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Habermas, "The Public Sphere," 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard Hauser, "Vernacular Dialogue and the Rhetoricity of Public Opinion," *Communication Monographs* 65, no. 2, (1998): 86.

<sup>14</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 127.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, "The Public Sphere," 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> This history is contested by many historiographers. The criticism of Habermas' model by some of these historiographers will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 51. This hints at the beginning of the formation of the upper class, since Habermas notes here that these groups of individuals were owners of “urban corporations and territorial organizations”.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 53. Critics of the Habermasian model, especially Mary P. Ryan in *Women in Public*, disputes this claim.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 52. These are private individuals who were not considered noble and/or princely.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> Key functions that form part of the six criteria of the public sphere discussed by Lincoln Dahlberg.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 52. “The sphere of private individuals assembled into a public body, which almost immediately laid claim to the officially regulated “intellectual newspapers” for use against the public authority itself.”

<sup>36</sup> Joan Landes referenced in Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 113-114.

<sup>37</sup> Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 95.

<sup>38</sup> Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 103–105.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp. 108–109.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>42</sup> A detailed explanation of her review of Habermas in connection to feminism and feminist theory is on pages 7–9 of Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> Geoff Eley, “Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Comparative Study of Social Transformations*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Eley, “Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures,” 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp. 10–11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, pp. 24–25.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>59</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, 11, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 131–132. Details of this record are available on pages 131–132.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 120. Zero degree culture is a space “so utterly bereft of any specific ethos as to accommodate with perfect neutrality and equal ease interventions expressive of any and every cultural ethos.” This is an utopian and arguably unattainable space, even in modern day public spheres.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>79</sup> Marc Raboy and Jeremy Shtern, “The Horizontal View,” in *Media Divides: Communication Rights and the Right to Communicate in Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 88–90.

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Siegel, *Politics and the Media in Canada: Second Edition* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1996), 182.

<sup>81</sup> David Taras, *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* (Peterborough: Broadview Press Limited, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> “OpenMedia.ca,” accessed on February 2, 2012, <http://openmedia.ca/>.



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- <sup>83</sup> Siegel, *Politics and the Media in Canada*, 20.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 1.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 2.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 7.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 8.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 11.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 96.
- <sup>90</sup> Taras, *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, 1999.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 29.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 33.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 46.
- <sup>94</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2006), 171-173.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 46.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 49.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 27.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 13.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 95.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 22. In Siegel, *Politics and Media in Canada*, 1996.
- <sup>101</sup> David Taras, "Media, Citizens, and Democracy," in *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* (Peterborough: Broadview Press Limited, 1999), 29-60.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 24.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 28.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 182.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 243.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 257.
- <sup>107</sup> Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 112.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 7.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 7.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 14.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 16.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid, pp. 24-25.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 28.
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, pp. 43–44.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, pp. 47–48.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>127</sup> Marc Raboy and Jeremy Shtern, *Media Divides*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>128</sup> Raboy and Shtern, “The Horizontal View,” in *Media Divides*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010): 64.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, pp. 75–76.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Electronic Media, Internet Forums, and the Political Public Sphere**

Over the years, the literature on public spheres has grown into diverse areas, including research on multiple public spheres,<sup>1</sup> cultural public spheres,<sup>2</sup> local, and global public spheres.<sup>3</sup> Specific to my study, I am reviewing the literature on how electronic media facilitates political public spheres. The themes that emerged in the literature review for my study explore: a) the public sphere as a concept; b) the potential for online public spheres; c) issues of access and the multiplicity of voices; and d) the political economy of new media vis-à-vis the influence of ownership and advertising. I explore these four themes to unpack some of the debates about the potential for Internet forums to poster public spheres in nation-states.

#### **a) The Public Sphere as a Concept**

In his case study of the Minnesota e-Democracy listserv,<sup>4</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg reviewed Jurgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere. Dahlberg identified and interrogated the six criteria that must be met for effective participation in the idealized Habermasian public sphere. These criteria are: i) autonomy from state and economic power, ii) exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims, iii) reflexivity, iv) ideal role taking, v) sincerity, and vi) discursive inclusion and equality.<sup>5</sup> Dahlberg uses

these six criteria to critique the Minnesota e-Democracy listserv. Dahlberg argues that the listserv was able to fulfill the six criteria of the public sphere. He thus considers the listserv to be a viable tool of access for participants to debate issues of common interest.<sup>6</sup> My study uses Dahlberg's model of the six criteria of the public sphere to critique the comments posted on CBC News during the 2011 federal election in Canada.

Dickie Wallace used Habermas' concept of the public sphere to review the interaction between community members and college students. Wallace investigates how the community members and students access a college radio station, WMUA, which he terms "a unique hybrid college radio station in Western Massachusetts."<sup>7</sup> He takes a critical perspective in reviewing the limits placed on students and the larger gains of the community from the radio station. Wallace observes that both the students and community members agree on the role of WMUA as a "community public sphere," even though it is a student radio station.<sup>8</sup> Wallace's observation is different from James A. Janack's, who conducted a study of Howard Dean's campaign website.<sup>9</sup> Wallace observed that community members, as users of the radio station, have more control of the tool than the students who set it up. By contrast, Janack notes that Howard Dean's website purposely gave up control of the forum to its users.

Andreas Gestrinch applies a critical approach in explaining Habermas' concept of the public sphere. He argues that in Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere, it is expected that the sphere will foster a "public

political reasoning in an environment in which the individual can speak freely and arguments are not distorted by fear or political or social power.”<sup>10</sup> Gestrich conducts a review of Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere in relation to historical records of modern Europe, wars, politics, and communication.<sup>11</sup> Gestrich’s observation buttresses Janack’s position that Habermas’ public sphere is “utopian.”<sup>12</sup> In his review of previous literature, Gestrich notes that even the 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere discussed by Habermas consisted of “elites, of nobility, civil servants, academics, priests, and only a few bourgeois men and women.”<sup>13</sup> This mix of participants from various strata of the society is likely similar to that which one might encounter on an Internet forum, although the deliberations in these forums may not be as critical as Habermas originally envisioned.

In his review of Habermas’ communicative action theory, Nicholas Garnham argues that Habermas’ concept of the public sphere is still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> He identifies the concept as a rationalist model of public discourse.<sup>15</sup> Garnham enumerates the advantages of Habermas’ concept as: a) making a firm connection between media and political institutions in his model of public discourse; b) indicating what tools are necessary for a public sphere to function; and c) showing the complexities involved in media-politics relationship and how this functions in capitalist economies versus welfare states. He considers Habermas even more poignant in the early 1990s because his theory reveals the shift whereby Western societies were privatizing information that should otherwise be publicly accessible.

Rather than advocating for pluralistic and multiple public spheres (with individuated agendas that lack cohesive and active power), Garnham insists that a universal “international” public sphere is more desirable because it will, in his view, better serve citizens in a globalizing world where technology has collapsed commerce and economic activities.<sup>16</sup> He draws his examples from the media, academic institutions, U.S. and U.K. government agencies as well as market regulations. He suggests that the liberal left’s support of public broadcasting has been mostly based on citizens’ need for information, yet the broadcasters themselves do not have any firm structure or funding. Unlike Nancy Fraser, Garnham does not endorse multiple public spheres. He argues that having multiple spheres may result in a fragmentation that would further prevent the opportunity for cohesive universal ideals. He concludes his piece by advocating for a universal public sphere, using concepts from Habermas’ work on communicative action to explore the European system of public broadcasting and politics.

Jodi Dean’s voice is distinct in arguing that the Internet is not a public sphere. She does not subscribe to the schools of thought that suggest the public sphere is plural. She firmly argues that there can only be one public while other spheres should be considered groups, since they are not bound by similar expectations.<sup>17</sup> Dean considers the Internet more of a tool for capitalist gains than for engaging in constructive dialogue. She notes that in attempts to maintain the status quo, there is a pseudo-alarm that the Internet is either too inclusive (come one, come all approach) or the clamour for

consensus online is misplaced. She considers the search for consensus a utopian ideal in an arena that attempts to foster equal opportunities and access.

Dean argues that the net is “a site of conflict” and a “zero institution” that “enables myriad conflicting constituencies to understand themselves as part of the same global structure even as they disagree over what the architecture of this structure should entail.”<sup>18</sup> Dean leans more towards the functionality of the web as advantageous for capitalist institutions and how this function overrides its usefulness for social organizations to deliberate and form consensus on contentious issues. She is more inclined to agree with Richard Rogers and Noortje Marres, who explore the Net from an “issues” standpoint, focusing on the issues that are discussed as opposed to the people engaging in the discussion. Rogers and Marres sidestep the Habermasian requirements of consensus and rationality. Rather, these two authors focus on the Internet’s ability, through the use of “interlocutors,” to determine who and what is at stake.<sup>19</sup> Rogers and Marres’ theory focuses on the issues being discussed while Habermas’ theory is more about the interlocutors in a public sphere.

### **b) The Potential for Online Public Spheres**

Many scholars, including Lincoln Dahlberg, Peter Dahlgren, Andreas Gestrinch, Steffen Albrecht, and James A. Janack, have discussed the role of the Internet in fostering a political public sphere in nation-states. Zizi Papacharissi reviews the diverse ways that the Internet can function as a

public sphere. She investigates what hinders or enhances this functionality, the usefulness of the Internet to the democratic process, and the applicability of its varied tools to political debates and discussions, groups, and processes. How can the Internet be used for politics in an era of growing voter apathy? Papacharissi distinguishes between “public space” and “public sphere”, clarifying that a new public space does not necessarily translate to a new public sphere.<sup>20</sup> The former is used merely for discussing issues while the latter’s effect should be reflected in the democratic process of a people or nation. Her aim is to see if political discussions in virtual spaces translate to action by having any effect on a society’s democracy.

In reviewing three aspects of the public sphere, Papacharissi observes that in terms of the technology of the Internet as a medium that transports information, people’s access to the Internet does not equate to participation in the public sphere. This is similar to Stephen Albrecht’s findings about the real-life online forums he studied in Germany.<sup>21</sup> I will return to Papacharissi’s and Albrecht’s observations when analyzing the CBC News data. In her essay, Papacharissi reports that the study of a real-life forum in The Netherlands shows that only a select few participated in the deliberations on the forum.<sup>22</sup> She argues that, “despite the fact that the Internet provides additional space for political discussion, it is still plagued by the inadequacies of a country’s political system. It provides public space, but does not constitute a public sphere.”<sup>23</sup> However, this statement presumes that there is a public sphere to begin with. It is essential to consider what measures



determine how and when a public space translates to public sphere. Must there always be action at the end of deliberation? Should policy change always be the end goal? Is it not sufficient that people are at least gathering to discuss and deliberate on the issues? Media scholars, Hill and Hughes, are consoled that, “at least people are talking about politics and protesting virtually online against democratic governments,” even though the Internet may not fulfill all the criteria of the public sphere.<sup>24</sup> James A. Janack agrees with Hill and Hughes.

Papacharissi is cautious in suggesting that the debates may not always translate to action. She hints at the complexities involved in politics as one reason why the Internet may not serve effectively as a public sphere. “Flaming and conflict” are huge drawbacks for participants in online discussion groups, though Papacharissi also notes, “online communication is about venting emotion”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Papacharissi does not see opinions expressed online affecting policies made by politicians or leaders because the two features that presumably enhance the public sphere in offline conversations – rationality and compromise – are difficult to attain in online discussions because of the anonymity and fluidity of identities afforded by the Internet technology. She questions the potential for the Internet to be used effectively for activism. The strong grip of capitalism on all areas of human life makes it near impossible to have an Internet forum that is totally devoid of commercial influence, either through advertising, sponsorship, product placement, or even standardization of information.

Papacharissi submits, moreover, that Internet access is still a privilege for a select few and beyond the reach of those who need it most. She asks, “how do we recreate something online, when it never really existed offline?”<sup>26</sup> She identifies fluidity of identity as a hindrance to the Internet’s ability to function as a public sphere. In addition, the anonymity afforded to Internet users makes it difficult to ascertain whether or not users’ online activities translate to offline action.

Papacharissi concludes that the Internet does function as a public space for people to deliberate on political and other issues, but this does not yet translate to a functionality that makes the Internet a public sphere for democratic societies. Her submission is hinged on the diversity and heterogeneity that characterize online discussion forums. These two pluralistic elements make it impossible to attain the universality required in the public sphere as envisioned by Habermas. Papacharissi insists that though the multiplicity of discussion sites and forums hold a promise for spheres of discussion, this does not validate the Internet as a fully functioning public sphere.

Peter Dahlgren has written extensively on deliberations in virtual space and its place in the public sphere. In his 2005 article, he leans towards the plural in his consideration of the public sphere, presenting the metaphorical space as “constituting many spaces” as opposed to being one uniform, universal arena.<sup>27</sup> Dahlgren is on the opposite side of the spectrum from Nicholas Garnham, who argues that plurality dilutes the effectiveness of the

public sphere. Garnham insists that a universal “international” public sphere will better serve citizens in a globalizing world.<sup>28</sup> Dahlgren’s analysis proposes the public sphere as three-fold:

the *structural dimension* has to do with the formal institutional features [including] media organizations, their political economy, ownership, control, regulations, and issues of their financing, as well as the legal frameworks defining the freedoms of – and constraints on – communication; the *representational dimension* refers to the output of the media, the mass media as well as “minimedia” that target specific small groups via, for example, newsletters or campaign promotion materials, [and] the *interactional* has to do with the citizens’ encounters with the media – the communicative processes of making sense, interpreting, and using the output; interaction is [also] that between citizens themselves, which can include anything from two-person conversations to large meetings.<sup>29</sup> [italics mine]

He explores the interactional in-depth, proposing the concept of *civic cultures* as a more viable tool for assessing virtual political discussions. He proposes that, “democracy resides ultimately with citizens who engage in talks with each other.”<sup>30</sup> Dahlgren traces concerns about a decline in democratic politics to the 1990s, which coincides with the emerging relevance of the Internet as a tool of communication. Unlike other communication scholars, including Papacharissi, Dahlgren sees the potential of the Internet as an extension of the public sphere beyond its function as a public space, though he also cautions that this potential for extension is still at a stage of infancy compared to other activities occurring on the Internet. Chief among these other activities is the technology’s use for commercial gain, which dwarfs its use for civic engagement aimed at achieving democratic ideals.

Dahlgren concedes, “for those who have access and the political motivation, and who are living within open, democratic societies, the Internet offers very viable possibilities for civic interaction but clearly cannot promise a quick fix for democracy.”<sup>31</sup> In the same context, Dahlgren acknowledges that the same cannot be said for people who live under repressive regimes even though structural and systemic silencing continue to be shattered by global outcries against such effrontery on free speech. He sees fragmentation as the downside of pluralism and dispersion. He posits that the Internet encourages this fragmenting as diverse groups dig their heels into their separate corners as opposed to making efforts towards common grounds while maintaining their uniqueness.

Dahlgren shares Papacharissi’s view that mere presence in the public sphere does not equate to active engagement. He posits that without deliberation translating to action, with a way of measuring its effect, the political process risks fostering apathetic citizens. Citizen apathy is a growing concern that liberal democracies in developed nations have been grappling with since late 1990s. Additionally, Dahlgren does not envisage the manifestation of a universal public sphere, as promoted by Nicholas Garnham, in the near future. The myriad of forums and groups meeting online, most of whose members cut across cultures, gender, and class does not permit such universality, Dahlgren argues. The deterrent to such universality is the lack of structural means of deciding on and enforcing collective ideals.

Dahlgren concludes by proposing “civic culture,” which is based in materialist and constructionist traditions, as an alternative tool of assessing political deliberations online. In this concept, citizens are considered “social agents” and one can interrogate the “*cultural* factors” based on which they exercise or withhold their agency.<sup>32</sup> His concept of civic cultures is similar to Rogers and Marres’ notion of neo-democracies. Dahlgren’s concept of civic culture foregrounds “meaning, identity, and subjectivity” as essential for analyzing citizens’ deliberations in public spheres.<sup>33</sup> Overall, he is optimistic that the Internet is playing a role in fostering a more diverse public sphere in open, democratic societies.

### **c) The Issue of Access and the Multiplicity of Voices**

James A. Janack’s content analysis of Howard Dean’s 2004 Democratic presidential nomination campaign blog analyzes the combination of techniques used by participants on *Blog for America* (BFA). Janack finds that the various techniques utilized in the BFA work to “limit discussion and citizen input while the technology and medium seemed to encourage it.”<sup>34</sup> The BFA 2004 blog was used to discuss issues such as the universal healthcare system, tax policy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the death penalty, and other issues of concern to most Americans at the time. Janack argues that even if Internet forums cannot fulfill the mandate of advancing a “healthy democratic process, they at least promote participation in a particular campaign, and such participation is more productive than the online surveys, games and parodies that proliferate on the WWW.”<sup>35</sup>

Janack's position illuminates the function of Internet blogs as a tool for a political candidate's supporters to engage in discussions about the candidate's proposed platform.

Steffen Albrecht similarly examines the use of a real-world web-based forum for political activism in Germany. Albrecht argues that deliberation is the most difficult aspect of political practices. Papacharissi shares Albrecht's concern in suggesting that compromise is difficult to attain in online discussions.<sup>36</sup> In reviewing the concept of deliberation, Albrecht notes John Dryzek's position that, "deliberation is supposed to foster communication on political issues in society and to strengthen the legitimacy of decisions."<sup>37</sup> Albrecht's study focuses on who was represented and who participated in the real-world web-based forum he analyzed. He argues that the Internet is viable for deliberating political issues though he also warns that social inequalities constrain this viability.

Albrecht notes that high hopes were invested in the Internet having the ability to erase several obstacles that plague political deliberations in democratic societies. He observes however that these hopes were quickly curtailed by the identification of the "digital divide" which brought to the foreground the fact that "access to the Internet is not distributed equally but follows well-known factors of inequality, such as income, education, gender, age, and race."<sup>38</sup> Albrecht's real-life web-based forum was based in Hamburg, Germany. However, his observations regarding inequality are similar to the pattern that emerged in the Statistics Canada data compiled by

George Sciadas<sup>39</sup> and the challenge of communication rights in Canada addressed by Marc Raboy and Jeremy Shtern.<sup>40</sup> From Albrecht's study, the activities on the Internet show that the technology does not offer a complete solution to the problem of deliberation in a democratic society, but instead works to reinforce some of these inequalities.<sup>41</sup>

Diana B. Carlin, Dan Schill, David G. Levasseur, and Anthony S. King also use content analysis in conducting their research. They focus on describing the behaviours of participants on Internet blogs to see how they gathered to discuss issues of common interest after the 9/11 attacks. Their research was conducted during the 2004 American Presidential election season and they focused more on studying participants on Internet blogs set up by media organizations as opposed to blogs set up by political candidates. The blogs set up by the media were used to discuss issues such as "candidate performance, expectations, voter leaning, and specific issues such as terrorism, the war in Iraq, world perceptions of the United States, healthcare, gay marriage, education, general comments about the campaign or politics, and the economy."<sup>42</sup> This longitudinal study used representative sampling in the content analysis of the selected blogs.

The study by Carlin et al. is similar to my research design for analyzing the CBC News Politics section, although my research is short-term rather than a longitudinal study. Unlike James A. Janack's observation, Carlin et al. note, "participants made arguments. They had positions on what issues were important, who did a better job of explaining them, [and] who debated

better.”<sup>43</sup> Essentially, the authors suggest that if people have access to the Internet and the motivation to participate in politics, they will engage in deliberations on political forums. However, Carlin et al. caution that a moderator is needed to ensure a more effective use of the Internet.<sup>44</sup> Their position echoes Janack’s idea that participants, if left on their own, cannot completely engage in the kinds of critical debates Habermas expects in his ideal public sphere. Dahlberg shares Carlin et al.’s and Janack’s views on the need for moderators in Internet forums. This call for a moderator stretches back to the early days of Internet forums more than two decades ago.

Olga Guedes Bailey and Ramaswani Harindranath investigate the plight of minorities and how they, as “voiceless subalterns,” can be included in the political process through alternative media.<sup>45</sup> Like Janack, their study’s orientation and epistemological approach is critical. They use secondary data in conducting a cultural analysis of “the majority” and “the other” to determine how the use of alternative media can foster a stronger participation of minorities in the public sphere.<sup>46</sup> Bailey and Harindranath note that the concepts of ethnicity, minority, and “the other” in social science theory have various meanings. The authors argue that alternative media is a useful tool for advancing debates in the broader public sphere, especially for minority groups whose access to mainstream media may be limited by lack of clout, finance, or means of access. Bailey and Harindranath propose an inclusive ‘multi-ethnic public sphere’ that will ensure that those who are less privileged can make contributions to the ongoing deliberations.



Bailey and Harindranath argue, “in alternative public spheres, the media and the constituencies it serves and informs are considered inseparable. They provide not only entertainment but, potentially, counter hegemonic views of current affairs and a proactive agenda of positive intervention in the ‘public sphere.’”<sup>47</sup> Their observation is similar to Nancy Fraser’s call for alternative forums that will serve minority groups like women.<sup>48</sup> Arthur Siegel and David Taras too consider the symbiotic relationship between the media and the people discussed by Bailey and Harindranath as fundamental in a democratic society. Bailey and Harindranath propose the adoption of a multi-ethnic public sphere that will ensure that possible multiplication and plurality does not interfere with political discourse in the broader public sphere.<sup>49</sup> The authors’ position counters the argument made by critics of Nancy Fraser, like Nicholas Garnham, that multiple public spheres could polarize discussions in the universal public sphere.

The rational-critical debate is the main ingredient of the Habermasian public sphere, especially in regards to participatory democracy.<sup>50</sup> Marijana Grbesa points out the paradox in Habermas’ expectation of equal and unrestricted participation, considering that his account of the early public sphere records it as constituted by bourgeois, wealthy men. She argues that public discussion is more accessible to the average person today than it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, while she acknowledges Habermas’ concern about polarization and commercialization. Grbesa notes that Habermas identified the media as playing a role in the decline of the public sphere

because it was instrumental in promoting “mass consumption and commodification of culture.”<sup>51</sup> The public relations industry was also lumped in with media as agents of this decline in the quality of debates in the public sphere. Grbesa works through the concept of “oppositional public sphere,” which aims for negotiated compromise instead of the ideal of consensus promoted by Habermas.<sup>52</sup>

Grbesa insists that the public sphere was a progressive concept when contextualized historically in the 18<sup>th</sup> century time period discussed by Habermas, although she also allows that it may not be realistic for contemporary democracies, especially when one considers the exclusion of certain groups of people from the discussion. This is a view shared partly by Nancy Fraser, as discussed in her earlier work in which she interrogates the potential of the public sphere for existing democracies.<sup>53</sup> Grbesa argues that the process and steps involved in deliberative democracy are as important as the result.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally, Grbesa examines the potential of public service broadcast media to set agendas and facilitate deliberations in the public sphere. She agrees with Paddy Scannel, who argues, “the fundamental commitment of the public service broadcasting is its universal availability, unlike the commercial broadcasters whose primary interest is profit.”<sup>55</sup> In this context, she refers to television public service broadcasting and its ability to represent “all social groups.”<sup>56</sup> I contest Grbesa’s claim. There is a persistent and uneven representation of negative versus positive portrayals of marginalized groups

in the media. Public broadcasters are not immune to this practice of uneven representation. Grbesa claims the paradox of Habermas' model is that he expects all citizens to participate yet suggests that mass participation reduces the quality of deliberation. She finds Habermas' concept of the public sphere useful for modern democracies though warns that its users must be cautious and ensure that it is contextualized in practice, rather than embracing the concept wholesale.

Chang Woo-Young conducts a study of some political forums in Korea and reviews the history of the country's conservative media. He advises that online communities started in Korea about two decades ago. He observes that there was an infiltration of alternative media in Korea in the mid-1990s and traces Korea's thriving bulletin boards to the country's "community culture," appetite for partisanship, and the government's investment in information technology.<sup>57</sup> Woo-Young notes that university students and young professionals were the first to embrace these communities. The members of these political forums are called "netizens."<sup>58</sup> Woo-Young argues that these political forums are polarizing.

Easy and inexpensive interactions among the forum members as well as "bottom-up agenda setting" are two structures Woo-Young found to be very effective in the forums he analyzed.<sup>59</sup> These forums featured open bulletin boards, closed user groups, and censorship rules, which were contested by the members. He argues that the forums function as sites for counter-publics to discuss issues without the restraints that mainstream media place on them. I

would argue that Woo-Young's attempt to unfetter alternative online discussion communities from mainstream media is not as successful. Most of the issues being discussed on alternative forums would have been originally published on mainstream media's websites. Woo-Young links the *non-gaek*,<sup>60</sup> polemic, online journalists in these forums to Gramsci's concept of "organic intellectuals."<sup>61</sup>

One key distinction between the participants (who are not journalists) on online forums and *non-gaek* commentators is the latter's focus on setting an agenda, which then directs the discussion on the forums. This distinction corresponds with common practice on some well established and emerging online discussion forums predominantly used by Nigerians in the home country and in the diaspora. [Nigeriavillagesquare.com](http://Nigeriavillagesquare.com)<sup>62</sup> and [nigeriansinamerica.com](http://nigeriansinamerica.com)<sup>63</sup> are some prime examples of such forums. The forums are considered essential for minority groups, who otherwise may not be represented in mainstream media. Yet it is common practice to find that seasoned journalists use the veil of anonymity on these forums to set agenda for the discussions. Similar to Papacharissi's and Albrecht's observations, Woo-Young argues that mere existence of online media cannot in and of itself lead to effective social activism. Citizens' level of use of the forum determines the effectiveness of online media and this is buttressed in his case study, which shows a clear correlation between online media and social movements' advocacy in Korea's politics.

In order to opportune otherwise unheard Europeans to voice their opinions about the future of Europe, the European Commission set up Futurum, “the online discussion forum linked to the Convention on the Future of Europe.”<sup>64</sup> Scott Wright conducted a case study of this Europe-wide discussion forum. The forum was set up by the European Commission to serve as a universal public space for all Europeans. Wright observes that a proposed transnational public sphere for European countries was considered problematic because there is no “pre-existing sense of collective identity” on the continent.<sup>65</sup> Wright reports that as a way to solve this problem of an elusive collective identity, Alex Warleigh proposed “critical deliberativism,”<sup>66</sup> which would aid in minimizing the anxiety resulting from a lack of communal ideals. Wright examined “the structure and policy impact of the discussions” occurring on the Futurum website to understand how it addresses issues about the European constitutional process.

In working through the potential of Futurum to be a transnational public sphere for Europeans, Wright invokes Habermas’ revision to the concept of the public sphere.<sup>67</sup> Wright considers Futurum an effective public sphere because it allowed many Europeans to engage in discussions on the forum, although he also reports a discrepancy between what was anticipated, i.e. an inclusive space that will give feedback at the European convention, and what the forum actually achieved. He notes that the results from the debates never made it to the convention hence there is no related policy change that can be traced back to the Futurum forum.

Wright's position is similar to Papacharissi's call for deliberation translating to action by way of policy change. By the same token, Wright argues that Futurum would have been more effective if it borrowed the public broadcasting model, as reflected in the British Broadcasting Corporation. He however raises some concerns about the full potential of a public broadcaster to fulfill the functions of a public sphere.<sup>68</sup> Wright argues that deliberativeness was a utopian task on the Futurum forum. In coding for access and inclusiveness, he noticed that participation was limited by "digital and linguistic divide," two issues that are a recurring theme on most discussion forums, including the CBC News.<sup>69</sup> Wright submits that opportunities exist for a transnational public sphere, though he would apply caution in assuming that Futurum has achieved that status.

#### **d) The Political Economy of New Media vis-à-vis the Influence of Ownership and Advertising**

Jacob Linaa Jensen conducts a comparison of government-owned vs. private-owned forums in a Scandinavian country. The private-owned forum is a usenet group of 65,000 participants in Denmark. He posits that public spheres do exist online. Jensen advises, "traditionally, in political science and media studies, the public sphere has been regarded as the fundamental link between citizens and politicians."<sup>70</sup> Jensen notes that on the private-owned forum, a few participants have a high percentage of posting although this does not automatically mean that they "dominate the debates."<sup>71</sup> He notes that people tend to post more comments when the issue is close to them

personally. Jensen observes, “one of the common complaints about net debates is that monologues tend to be the rule; strident individuals who dominate each from their own ‘pulpit’ without really exchanging arguments.”<sup>72</sup> He also explores the challenge posed by anonymity as allowing posters to sometimes derail the discussion without fear of consequences. Like Papacharissi, Jensen argues that it is difficult to measure how discussions on the Internet translate to action in real life through policy change. He cautions against making grand conclusions based on the information gathered from his online survey of participants on these two forums. Some of the elements he explored in his survey include the digital divide, lurkers, and gender gap.

As part of his recommendations for an effective online public sphere, Jensen notes, “extensive and daily Internet use is a prerequisite for participating in online political discussions.”<sup>73</sup> He advises that online political discussion is also effective in mobilizing the youth in most communities. Jensen suggests that government initiated online forums may garner more participation from citizens than private-owned online forums because often times, it is mostly the few who have deep interest in politics that uses such forums. He noticed a drawback that suggests the marginalized are not really participating and neither are new immigrants mobilized via the Internet discussion forums. In his survey results, Jensen noticed some participants considered their online debates as equivalent to “letters to the editor.”<sup>74</sup> He concludes, as do Albrecht and Dahlberg, that it is essential to regulate online

forums though this brings up a challenge for inclusivity as a condition of the public sphere.

American voters' use of the National Issues Forum, a 31-year-old initiative for modern democracy, was the focus of Michael Hamill Remaley and Patty Dineen's study. They present the forum as a "nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored public forums," that is not subject to the influence of corporate media ownership or dependent on advertising revenue.<sup>75</sup> The forum is primarily focused on giving voters an opportunity to deliberate on issues about public discourse in America. It dissects public policies and examines ways to influence change at the grassroots level. The authors note that the organization does not engage in advocacy work but rather trains citizens on how to engage in public deliberation and running public forums. They claim that forum moderators are neutral, a position I contest because it is not practical to assume that any moderator will not be influenced by his or her own personal stand on the issues being moderated.

The National Issues Forum is a collection of real-life, in-person forums using an issues-based approach, similar to the concept advanced by Richard Rogers and Noortje Marres.<sup>76</sup> In these forums, three approaches are given as options for addressing one specific issue and participants are encouraged to discuss this issue from any of the three approaches presented. The result of a 2006 nationwide discussion organized by the National Issues Forum shows that Americans were experiencing a disconnect from democracy. The director of one of the centres that is connected to the National Issues Forum expressed



that “deliberation builds skills necessary for working with others on potentially divisive issues in non-adversarial ways. It’s not about changing fundamental beliefs, but seeing new possibilities.”<sup>77</sup> These forums create public spaces and give people skills that enable them to engage in deliberation about issues of common interest.

Remaley and Dineen allude to “an underlying insecurity about the worth of public opinion, somewhat paradoxically coupled with a commonly held, deeply felt yearning to be heard.”<sup>78</sup> These real-life forums have some similarities to the *constructed* real-world web-based forums observed by Stefen Albrecht in Europe. Though there is no evidence of potential for policy change, some participants in these forums still found it useful to at least make their voices heard. Even more importantly, knowing that the forums are organized at a grassroots level, as opposed to being influenced by capitalist interests, is considered an advantage that enriches discussions taking place in these forums.

Most of the currently published literature on the public sphere are from studies of websites and forums set up by political parties, political candidates, activist groups, or government agencies. I did not encounter many publications about how public broadcasters foster the public sphere – especially in relation to digital media and specifically online forums – in North America. My research potentially fills this gap in the literature, especially for public broadcasting in Canada and by extension, North America.

The foregoing discussion highlights some of the key debates about online forums, public spheres, and citizens' engagement in politics. The concept of the public sphere as revised by scholars like Fraser, Garnham, and Dean is fluid. This fluidity enables one to engage in discussions and practices that can ultimately filter back into a nation's broader public sphere. As advanced by Dahlberg and Dahlgren though contested by Papacharissi, the Internet, and specifically online discussion forums, have the viability to act as a site for political discussions that could translate to social change. However, Albrecht, Bailey and Harindranath, Grbesa, and Wright point out that accessibility to the Internet is one of the challenges that hinder the participation of a diverse group of people in these forums. Grbesa and Wright cautiously promote the continuity of public broadcasting service (and by extension, their online services) to foster a more inclusive environment for citizens to engage each other on issues of common concern.

Based on the literature, I would argue that people are participating in online forums. Hitherto, the traditional forms of access to the public sphere have been phone-in shows on radio and television, appearing as a studio audience, writing letters to the editors of a newspaper and magazine, or making a guest appearance on most talk shows. By participating in online forums, citizens are arguably taking advantage of an alternative to the traditional and mainstream forms of access, which previously offered limited opportunities for a wide pool of community members spread across the country. I should also point out that European scholars are doing more work

about civic engagement while North American scholars seem to focus on media ownership and structure in this debate.

### **Why Make Communication a Social Justice Issue?**

The Internet, as a communication tool, has become a staple that is recognized by the United Nations as a basic necessity for human rights.<sup>79</sup> Arthur Siegel records that “3.5 million Canadians, or 12 percent of the population, were reportedly using the Internet in 1995.”<sup>80</sup> By 2007, more than 19 million Canadians, 73% of the population, were using the Internet.<sup>81</sup> “In 2010, 8 out of 10 Canadian households (79%) had access to the Internet”<sup>82</sup> (in figure 2.1). Over the last few years, the United Nations has worked to guide countries in the way they should make Internet connectivity accessible to their citizens. As Jan Chipchase notes, “the United Nations, in fact, recently declared that disconnecting people from the Internet is a violation of human rights.”<sup>83</sup> From the Statistics Canada data (in figure 2.1), it is obvious that Internet connectivity in Canadian households is relatively high. Raboy and Shtern emphasize that the Canadian government has invested a lot of resources into ensuring the penetration of communication technologies in communities across Canada, although they also warn that connectivity does not equate effective and informed usage.<sup>84</sup>

When broken down, the Statistics Canada’s 2010 Internet Use Survey reports that one in five Canadian homes had no Internet access in 2010. This group makes up 21% of Canadian households. 56% of this group said “they

had no need for or interest in it [Internet],” while other reasons reported for no Internet access were “the cost of service or equipment (20%), or lack of a device such as a computer (15%).” Other reasons include, “about 12% of households reported they lacked confidence, knowledge or skills. Relatively more households in the lowest income quartile reported the cost of service or equipment (24%) as a reason” for not having Internet access.<sup>85</sup> When compared to information from 1995, 2002, or 2007, there is evidence of an improvement in the number of households that have Internet connectivity.<sup>86</sup> However, the digital divide in Canada endures based on income, education, and age, which are some of the same factors George Sciadas identified in his 2002 study of Internet usage for Statistics Canada.

**Figure 2.1 Households with home Internet access<sup>87</sup>**

	2010
	%
<b>Canada</b>	<b>79</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	74
Prince Edward Island	73
Nova Scotia	77
New Brunswick	70
Quebec	73
Ontario	81
Manitoba	73
Saskatchewan	76
Alberta	83
British Columbia	84

Chipchase argues that both an individual and the community are disadvantaged when they lack Internet access,

In the United States, 92 percent of Americans rely on multiple sources for news, combining traditional print, TV, and radio and online sources, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, and among those who get news online, 75 percent receive their news via email or posts on social networking sites. 52 percent share news links with others via those sites. Statistics such as these suggest that those people who do not have access to the Internet are missing out; not only are we deprived of their voices, but also of their ability to learn about and interact with their communities and the world.<sup>88</sup>

Siegel notes, “perhaps the most important characteristic of the Internet is interactivity; it is an electronic forum where one can send an instant reaction to words and images, or participate in a long-term discussion group to exchange ideas about any and all subjects.”<sup>89</sup> Siegel’s explanations of the potentials of Internet forums, blogs, and/or listservs pale in comparison to what the Internet allows and enables its users to do today.

In the context of my research, I agree with Raboy and Shtern that it is not enough for the Canadian government to invest in communication technologies at the expense of educating Canadians on how to use these technologies. What is the value of being able to connect to the Internet when a person does not have the technical knowledge or language proficiency essential for taking advantage of the technology? Additionally, the higher percentage of connectivity (in figure 2.1), in British Columbia at 84% and Ontario at 81% compared to 73% in Prince Edward Island or 70% in New

Brunswick signposts a further digital divide based on location. This creates a division that needs to be addressed both at the level of technological and educational investments to ensure that Canadians get equal opportunities to access and use these communication tools.

From Barry's arguments, one can see that there are many layers of inequality that someone has to overcome in order to take advantage of opportunities for gainful employment, education, social mobility, and public engagement. Through their review of the communication rights rhetoric in Canada, Raboy and Shtern highlight the issue of digital divide and how the Canadian government is implicated in it. Raboy and Shtern's investigation gives a focused and urgent credence to why communication is a social justice issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation**

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), also known as CBC/Radio-Canada, is a publicly owned, government-funded crown corporation that was established in 1936 in Canada. It started with a radio service and later added television transmissions, with the more recent addition of programming and discussion forums on new media platforms. The CBC has an English website, [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca), established in 1996, and a French website, [www.radio-canada.ca](http://www.radio-canada.ca). CBC also maintains a presence on numerous social media websites, including Facebook and Twitter. The CBC

has a national reach through its radio and television programming. In the “About Us” section of its website, the CBC states,

CBC/Radio-Canada is Canada's national public broadcaster and one of this country's largest cultural institutions. Through the delivery of a comprehensive range of radio, television, Internet, and satellite-based services, CBC-Radio/Canada is available how, where, and when Canadians want it. We bring diverse regional and cultural perspectives into the daily lives of Canadians in English, French and eight aboriginal languages, and in seven languages on our international Radio service, RCI. Our media sites, CBC.ca and Radio-Canada.ca, describe upcoming programs, provide a multitude of video and audio files, plus local, national and international news and weather; and invite you to *join a national conversation*. CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate is set out in the 1991 Broadcasting Act. CBC/Radio-Canada is accountable to all Canadians, reporting annually to Parliament through the Minister of Canadian Heritage.<sup>90</sup> [Italics mine]

The CBC's mandate, as set out in the 1991 Broadcasting Act, states,

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, as the national public broadcaster, should provide radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains; ...the programming provided by the Corporation should:

- i. be predominantly and distinctively Canadian, reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions,
- ii. actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression,
- iii. be in English and in French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities,
- iv. strive to be of equivalent quality in English and French,
- v. *contribute to shared national consciousness and*

- identity,*  
 vi. be made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means and as resources become available for the purpose, and  
 vii. *reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada.*<sup>91</sup> [Italics mine]

On its website, the CBC explains further that the corporation “occupies a unique position of trust. Not only is it the most substantial and broadly based broadcast journalism organization in Canada, it is funded, through Parliament, by the people of Canada.”<sup>92</sup> By extension, the corporation strives to serve all Canadians and “considers it a duty to provide consistent, high quality information upon which all citizens may rely.”<sup>93</sup>

In discussing public broadcasting in Canada, David Taras argues that, “broadcasting is nothing less than the central public place, the village square, of Canadian life.”<sup>94</sup> Taras considers CBC an important fabric of Canadian life. He argues that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, “people became connected by being exposed to the same newspapers, magazines and catalogues.”<sup>95</sup> Taras, echoing Siegel, notes that the threat posed by America’s proximity to Canada affected the service potential of broadcasting to “unite” Canadians. Public broadcasting came to the rescue because the challenge of “great distances and a sparse population” did not lend themselves to private broadcasting. Taras notes that the overriding sentiment that “the air belongs to the people” led to the triumph of broadcasting as “public trust” over private interests.<sup>96</sup>

The three objectives of public broadcasting in Canada identified by Taras are: 1) to ward off American cultural influence, 2) “to unify the country by



bridging the enormous gap that existed between French- and English-speaking Canadians and the different regions of the country”, and 3) to “promote citizenship and community values.”<sup>97</sup> Taras argues that the second objective failed because the public broadcasting system ended up as two services – one for French- and one for English-speaking Canada. Taras also credits this goal for the advantage, though counter-productive, that Quebec had in its drive for nationalism. He notes that, “the creation of an exclusive Quebec public square in broadcasting could not help but have stirred nationalist sentiments.”<sup>98</sup>

Additionally, Taras advises that, “in its first decade, the CBC succeeded in creating a new public gathering place and a sense of belonging and identification that hadn’t existed before in quite the same way.”<sup>99</sup> Some of this success includes the coverage of the 1939 royal tour, the development of Canadian sports culture (linked to the broadcasting of *Hockey Night in Canada*), and *The National Farm Radio Forum*, which is an interactive radio talk program that started in 1941. Taras sees these events as bringing to Canadians “new meeting places, [and] new public squares.”<sup>100</sup> He further credits CBC radio for helping in developing a vibrant relationship between Canadians and their government. Taras highlights the U.S. 1935 federal election as “the first time Canadians were able to experience the drama of an election night together.”<sup>101</sup> He notes further that the CBC also played a vital role as a unifying national force during World War II. Taras submits that,

“during the periods of 1930s to 1960s, the CBC was without rival the main engine of Canadian cultural life.”<sup>102</sup>

Fast forward 30 years and Taras advises that the 1990s brought some major challenges for the CBC, including budget cuts, audience loss, and more competition from private broadcasters. He argues, “the politics of public broadcasting have undoubtedly influenced the reporting of politics.”<sup>103</sup> He recalls three controversies that threatened the Canadian public broadcaster: 1) the cancellation of CBC radio’s *Preview Commentary* in 1959 by the Diefenbaker government, 2) the cancellation of *This Hour Has Seven Days* during Lester Pearson’s government in 1966, and 3) *The Valour and Horrors*’ 1992 revisionist historical look (during Brian Mulroney’s government) at World War II and Canada’s role in it, especially in relation to three battles.<sup>104</sup>

Taras concludes that, “in reality the chill that affects the CBC is a budgetary chill. There is always the fear that in angering politicians, the CBC will not have friends at the table when its budgets are being decided.”<sup>105</sup> It is difficult to disagree with Taras on this point. In 2011, the CBC was back in the news for another controversy about the money allocated to it in the 2011 federal budget. As recently as January 2012, three conservative MPs presented a bill asking that the government stop funding the CBC and that the crown corporation should be sold.<sup>106</sup> Despite all these challenges, the CBC’s function as a public broadcaster that holds a mirror to Canadians from coast-to-coast endures. For Taras, “the CBC’s supporters would argue that the

public broadcaster is still the village square that Canadians come to in order to express themselves and to laugh and cry at their own difficulties and experiences.”<sup>107</sup> These expressions and many others alluded to by Taras are some of what I encountered on the CBC News online forum while conducting my study.

### **The CBC and the Canadian Federal Election 2011**

The federal budget was presented on March 23, 2011. There was a non-confidence vote on March 25, 2011, which brought the minority Conservative government down. The minority Conservative government, led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, was found in contempt of Parliament by a vote of 156 to 145. The federal election was called on March 26, 2011. Election Day was Monday, May 2, 2011. The CBC was accused of a liberal, left wing bias very early in the campaign, especially because of the results received by most users of its innovative Vote Compass tool on its website.<sup>108</sup> The tool suggested most of the users were liberal, even when they picked neutral answers to some of the questions asked.

On election night, the Conservatives won a majority of seats while the NDP, led by the late Jack Layton, made history by winning a record 103 seats to become the Official Opposition party. It was the first time in the 50-year history of the NDP that it attained Official Opposition status. More than half of the NDP's seats were from Quebec, a former stronghold of the Bloc Quebecois party. The NDP had one seat going into the elections but came out

with 58 seats in Quebec. The Liberals lost more than half of their seats, going from 77 to 34 across the nation. The leader of the Liberal party, Michael Ignatieff, warned that the Tories will claim to lead from the centre but may be pulling the country to the far right, while the NDPs may claim to be leading from the centre but pulling the country to the left. Ignatieff argued these pulls could lead to a polarization of the country and perhaps the beginning of a two-party state.

On his re-election as Prime Minister and now armed with a Majority government, Stephen Harper promised in his victory speech that the Conservatives will govern for all Canadians. The Bloc Quebecois, led by Gilles Duceppe, won only four seats, although they went into the elections with 40. The party was relegated to a non-party status, following the huge loss suffered during the elections.<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth May of the Green Party also made history on May 2, 2011 and became a Member of Parliament. She won her home riding of Saanich-Gulf Islands in British Columbia, thereby securing the first Green Party seat in the House of Commons.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

In her victory speech, which was aired on CBC television, Olivia Chow, the NDP candidate for Trinity-Spadina riding in the Greater Toronto Area and wife of the late NDP leader Jack Layton, said, “democracy is not just the vote; it’s also the participation.”<sup>110</sup> In monitoring activities on social media websites and the websites of both public and private media organizations in

Canada, I observed a vibrant level of participation and contribution to the two debates organized by the broadcast consortium.

A poll result shared on CBC television revealed that one in five Canadians was having political discussions online.<sup>111</sup> The federal leaders' election debates, in English and French, were focused on Canada on the world stage, immigration and multiculturalism, the justice system, and healthcare (for the English debate), while governance and democracy, gun control, economy and government spending, values, social policies, Quebec's place in Canada, and Canada's place in the world were the focus of the French debate.

Sixty-one percent of eligible Canadian voters cast votes in the 2011 federal election. This was still considered a low turnout but better than the 58% who voted in the 2008 federal election. Closer to election night, the excessively publicized royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton on April 29 and the sudden demise of Osama Bin Laden on May 1, 2011 overshadowed the election campaign. The potential for researching participation online could not have come at a better time. Having an election at this time was a golden opportunity for my study, which would have otherwise been a retrospective look at the 2007 Ontario provincial election.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109–142.

<sup>2</sup> James McGuigan, "The Cultural Public Sphere," in *Spheres of Influence, Intellectual and Cultural Publics from Shakespeare to Habermas*, eds. Alex Benchimol and Willy Maley. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 243–264.

<sup>3</sup> Kaarin Taipale, "The Shift from Local Public Space to Global Public Sphere," *UN Chronicle* 43, no. 2, (2006): 34–36.

<sup>4</sup> A listserv is based on an email system that enables two-way communication between the users.

<sup>5</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg, "Extending the Public Sphere through Cyberspace: The Case of Minnesota E-Democracy," *First Monday* 6, no. 3, (2001), accessed November 1, 2010, <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/838/747>.

<sup>6</sup> Dahlberg, "Extending the Public Sphere," 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Dickie Wallace, "Reinventing the Wheel vs. Grinding the Same Old Axe: An Ethnographic View of the Students and Community Members at a Massachusetts College Radio Station," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 5, no. 1, (2008): 44.

<sup>8</sup> Wallace, "Reinventing the Wheel", 2008:45.

<sup>9</sup> James A. Janack, "Mediated Citizenship and Digital Discipline: A Rhetoric of Control in a Campaign Blog," *Social Semiotics* 16, no. 2, (2006): 297.

<sup>10</sup> Andreas Gestrich, "The Public Sphere and the Habermas Debate," *German History* 24, no. 3, (2006): 415.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 415.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 297.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 417.

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Garnham, "The Media and the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 359–376.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 360.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 372.

<sup>17</sup> Jodi Dean, "Why the Net is not a Public Sphere," *Constellations* 10, no. 1, (2003): 97.

<sup>18</sup> Dean, "Why the Net is not a Public Sphere," 105–106. "Zero institution" is a concept developed by Levi-Strauss. It is considered "an empty signifier that itself has no determinate meaning but that signifies the presence of meaning. It is an institution with no positive function at all: all it does is signal the actuality of social institutions as opposed to pre-institutional chaos. Such zero institutions appear in political theory in Machiavelli's Prince and Rousseau's Legislator. As institutions, they signify the beginning and founding of something, marking that instance of transformation from the chaotic period prior to the founding. They have no governmental or constitutional role."

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107. Dean attended a workshop by Rogers and Marres at which they presented a paper titled "Competing Realities: The Social Lives of Issues on and off the Web" in Budapest from July 23 – 28 2001.

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<sup>20</sup> Zizi Papacharissi, "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere," *New Media and Society* 4, no. 1, (2002): 11.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Albrecht, "Whose Voice is Heard in Online Deliberation? A Study of Participation and Representation in Political Debates on the Internet," *Information, Communication, and Society* 9, no. 1, (2006): 62-82.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13. Papacharissi is referencing a study conducted by Jankowski and Van Selm (2000) in which the authors found that "elites" are more likely to engage in online discussions and there is no guarantee that these discussions will have an effect on policies.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation," *Political Communication* 22, (2005): 156.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 372.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151. Blumler and Gurevitch (2001), cited in Dahlgren, also share this view.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 157. Authors' italics.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 287.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 298.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63. While information provision and voting are the other two major political practices, Albrecht notes a growing interest in the use of the Internet for deliberating on political issues.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> George Sciadas, "The Digital Divide in Canada," accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/56f0009x/56f0009x2002001-eng.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Marc Raboy and Jeremy Shtern, "The Horizontal View," *Media Divides*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010): 64.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Diana B. Carlin, Dan Schill, David G. Levasseur, and Anthony S. King, "The Post-9/11 Public Sphere: Citizen Talk About the 2004 Presidential Debates," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8, no. 4, (2005): 622.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 623.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 633.

<sup>45</sup> Olga Guedes Bailey and Ramaswani Harindranath, "Ethnic Minorities, Cultural Difference and the Cultural Politics of Communication," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 2, no. 3, (2006): 299.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 299.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 307.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 311.

<sup>50</sup> Marijana Grbesa, "Why if at all is the Public Sphere a Useful Concept?" *Politicka Misao* XL, no. 5, (2003).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 113. The concept is advanced by Livingstone and Lunt (1994).

<sup>53</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 1992.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 114. Habermas aims for consensus as end result. Thomas Christiano, as referenced by Grbesa, says the process is an essential part of deliberation.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 116. Scannel, as cited in Grbesa.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup> Chang Woo-Young, "The Internet, Alternative Public Sphere and Political Dynamism: Korea's *Non-Gaek* (Polemist) Websites," *The Pacific Review* 18, no. 3, (2005): 395. By contrast, Canadian media scholars, notably Siegel and Taras, have lamented the lack of this notion of community culture and often considered it a missing element that frustrates the quest to foster a national media landscape in Canada. The project of multiculturalism and the challenge of covering Canada's huge land mass have been cited as some of the reasons why fostering a national community culture is almost impossible.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 395. Netizens are online social activists.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 395.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 393. "The *non-gaek* are reformist online journalists involved in forming and leading public opinion. They play the central role of setting agenda, writing columns, and interacting with the 'netizens'."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 398. "For Gramsci, who thought that social role was more important than intellectual capability, individuals engaged in trench warfare for the acquisition of the hegemony of civil society were organic intellectuals" (in *Gramsci's Prison Notebooks II*, (translated), Antonio Gramsci, 1995: 13-34).

<sup>62</sup> NigeriaVillageSquare.com, accessed on February 12, 2012, <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/>.

<sup>63</sup> NigeriansInAmerica.com, accessed on February 12, 2012, <http://www.nigeriansinamerica.com/>.

<sup>64</sup> Scott Wright, "A Virtual European Public Sphere? The Futurum Discussion Forum," *Journal of European Public Policy* 14, no. 8, (2007): 1167.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 1168. This is a challenge that would resonate with the Canadian cases of attempts to foster a national public sphere through the media.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 1168. "Critical deliberativism is both a model of, and tool for, the application of deliberative democracy in the European union (EU) context. For Warleigh, one of the strengths of deliberative approaches is that they do not assume a pre-existing sense of community, and that the process of deliberation can help to produce a deeper feeling of mutuality from the bottom up."



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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 1169. "It is a room, analogous to a large hall, with many differently styled and segmented discussion spaces." (Habermas, 1996:373). In his 2005 study, referenced earlier in this chapter, Dahlgren expands on Habermas' concept, "a functioning public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates – ideally in an unfettered manner – and also the formation of political will (i.e. public opinion)."

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 1173. Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman proposed forums that are "publicly funded but independent of government" as better positioned to facilitate such discussions as were occurring on the Futurum forum.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 1173.

<sup>70</sup> Jacob Linnaa Jensen, "Public Spheres on the Internet: Anarchic or Government-Sponsored – A Comparison," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 26, no. 4, (2003): 350.

<sup>71</sup> Jensen, "Public Spheres on the Internet," 2003: 356.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 357. Referencing Wilhelm (1998), Hills and Hughes (1998).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 366.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 371.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Hamill Remaley and Patty Dineen, "Constructing a Modern Democracy, One Forum at a Time," *National Civic Review*, Summer, (2007): 42.

<sup>76</sup> Remaley and Dineen, "Constructing a Modern Democracy," 46.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 46. Joni Doherty, director of New Hampshire's New England Center of Civic Life.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>79</sup> David Kravets, U.N. Report Declares Internet Access a Human Right," accessed on February 12, 2012, <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/06/internet-a-human-right/>.

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Siegel, *Politics and the Media in Canada: Second Edition* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1996), 258.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>82</sup> "Canadian Internet Use Survey," accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/110525/dq110525b-eng.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> Jan Chipchase. "Is Internet Access a Human Right?" Accessed October 22, 2011, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/07/14/is-Internet-access-a-human-right/>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Canadian Internet Use Survey. Accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/110525/dq110525b-eng.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> George Sciadras, "The Digital Divide in Canada." Accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/56f0009x/56f0009x2002001-eng.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> Households with home Internet access. Accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/110525/t110525b1-eng.htm>. A review is also available at <http://www.cbc.ca/m/rich/news/story/2011/05/25/technology-Internet-use-statistics-canada.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 259.

<sup>90</sup> "About Us," accessed November 5, 2011, <http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/about/index.shtml>.

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<sup>91</sup> "Broadcasting Policy for Canada," accessed November 5, 2011, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/B-9.01/page-2.html#h-4>.

<sup>92</sup> "Journalistic Standards and Policies," accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/policies.html>.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> David Taras, *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* (Peterborough: Broadview Press Limited, 1999), 117.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 121-123.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp. 129-140.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> "CBC Cuts: Conservative MPs' Petitions Call for End of Government Funding or Sale as Salary Info Released," accessed February 2, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/01/31/cbc-funding-cuts\\_n\\_1245378.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/01/31/cbc-funding-cuts_n_1245378.html).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>108</sup> "Vote Compass Passes 1 Million Mark," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 4, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/03/cv-election-vote-compass.html>.

<sup>109</sup> A party needs 12 seats to be officially recognized as a federal party in the Parliament of Canada.

<sup>110</sup> Chow also indicated the expectation that the people who voted for the NDP will continue to engage in the political process. From CBC television news broadcast of May 3, 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Poll shared on CBC News on April 13<sup>th</sup>. For instance, there were 38,000 debate-related tweets by 11pm ET on the #CBC Twitter timeline alone. This suggests that some Canadians were engaging with the political process.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Online Platforms: CBC News Politics Forum**

At the beginning of the 2011 federal election campaigns, the issues that were being addressed by the five political leaders revolved around ethics, economy, employment, education, healthcare, and the elderly. Some of these issues were later featured in the federal party leaders' debates on April 12 and 13, 2011. The articles published by CBC News about these issues drew extended comments from the forum participants. I conducted both a quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the comments under the articles published on CBC News based on the six criteria of the public sphere as described by Lincoln Dahlberg.

In working through these six criteria, I would suggest that the manifestation of some aspects of the criteria for public sphere 'legitimacy' is enough evidence that online forums like the CBC's can help foster a public sphere in nation-states. If enough aspects from multiple criteria are in evidence, then not every aspect of any given criterion needs to be manifested. The CBC News forum, or any online forum, would exhibit some of these criteria as operationalized by Dahlberg, albeit in diverse and, at times, limited forms.

### **Data Collection and Coding Strategy**

My data collection strategy was multi-layered. A few days before the federal budget was presented, there was speculation on most television news broadcasts that the three major federal opposition parties (Liberal, NDP, and Bloc Quebecois) would not approve the Conservative budget. I watched the live broadcast of the budget presentation by the Finance Minister, Jim Flaherty, on March 23, 2011 and also monitored the three opposition party leaders' responses. Based on the opposition parties' rejection of the budget, I set up an RSS feed to monitor all articles published on the CBC News Politics online pages.

Following the failure of the Conservative party to win the non-confidence vote of March 25, 2011, Prime Minister Stephen Harper requested that Governor General David Johnston dissolve the government. This request was granted and the 40<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Canada was dissolved. This dissolution led to an official call for a federal election by Prime Minister Stephen Harper on March 26, 2011. The RSS feed I set up remained active from March 23, 2011 (when the federal budget was presented) to May 9, 2011 (one week after the election).

I conducted periodic review of the stories as they were delivered through the RSS feed to my computer and a periodic review of the CBC News website to cross check the stories available there with the ones I was receiving through the RSS feed. I also frequently read and reviewed the

comments under the articles being published on the CBC News but did not participate in any of the discussions in the comments section. I did, however, participate in the discussions on CBC's Facebook and Twitter pages, especially on the two nights of the debates and on election night.

After May 9<sup>th</sup>, I saved all 312 stories that were delivered to my computer via the RSS feed and organized them alphabetically. I then randomly selected 10% of the articles (31) to represent all of the stories published in the CBC News politics section in that timeframe. Only 28 articles made the final selection. The other three articles were not about the federal election so I did not include them in the data coding or analysis. The comments under these 28 articles ranged from a low of 5 comments per story to a high of 4,210 comments. I reviewed the comments under the 28 articles and selected the first 25 comments on each article for coding and analysis. To further nuance the data analysis, I then conducted a cross-examination of the six criteria of the public sphere to explore some of the patterns found in the data. Numerical codes representing the criteria for a public sphere were applied to the comments made by the participants on the forum.

Overall, I coded 666 comments in the 28 articles. I coded the first 25 comments in each article, except for article #24 (Social Media: the Leaders' Speeches<sup>1</sup>) that had only 5 comments and article #28 (Your Answers: What Kind of Election do you think Canada Votes 2011 has been?<sup>2</sup>) that had only 11 comments. The 28 articles selected for final coding and analyses are:

1) 2 Bloc Members Support NDP

- 2) Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog Post
- 3) Cagefighter, Bartender, Musician among new MPs
- 4) CBC in Nunavut Blasted for Nixing Election Forum
- 5) Coalition Questions Return to Campaign
- 6) Election Misses Mark with Students
- 7) Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says
- 8) Green Party Leader First to Stop in Calgary
- 9) Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening
- 10) Harper Ready 'to hit the Ground Running'
- 11) Harper Would Extend Fitness Tax Credit
- 12) Ignatieff Defends Foreign Voting Record
- 13) Ignatieff Underlines \$1B Family Care Plan
- 14) Layton Defends Against 'Stop-Gap' Candidates
- 15) Layton Turns Attacks Back on Rivals
- 16) Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures
- 17) Liberal Vote Only Way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff
- 18) Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service
- 19) May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push
- 20) NDP Leader Doubts Bin Laden Photos Exist
- 21) NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence
- 22) Nunavut Ex-Premier Named Liberal Candidate
- 23) Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality
- 24) Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches

25) The House: The Twitter Election

26) Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early

27) Vote Compass Passes 1 Million Mark

28) Your Answers: What Kind of Elections Do You Think Canada Votes

2011 has been?

In conducting the quantitative critique, I was interested in understanding the tone of participation (as determined by the level of reflexivity I encountered in the comments, among other factors) and to what extent the participation may be construed as an engagement in the public sphere. I chose to look at the CBC News forum because the CBC is a public broadcaster that is expected to be inclusive and has a mandate to reach *all* Canadians. I also conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of two of the criteria of the public sphere (autonomy from state and economic power, and discursive inclusion and equality). The elements of these two criteria lend themselves to qualitative analysis because they are mostly factors that relate to the CBC News platform itself. Almost all of the comments that I reviewed had more than one code applied. My strategy was to apply codes to statements within each posting as opposed to just applying one code to the entire posting. Because there are instances of multiple statements within single postings, one would often find an occurrence of on-topic, off-topic, and flaming in individual postings. As a result, individual postings were not coded as stand-alone but rather codes were assigned to statements within each posting.

There are few occurrences of borderline codes in which it was hard to tell if, for instance, an utterance was on-topic, off-topic, or flaming. An example is in article #5 (Coalition Questions Return to Campaign<sup>3</sup>). A participant by the handle *eCitizen* posted this comment:

“coalition questions return to campaign” ..... Should  
read “Harper and the Media Create Coalition Straw Man”  
(A5P3)

On the one hand, the post appears to be on-topic because the participant acknowledges the title of the story yet it can also be construed as off-topic because he or she does not really make any specific contribution to the discussion.

### **CBC News and the Habermasian Public Sphere**

I coded the data for comments that were on-topic, off-topic, and flaming, as well as criteria two (validity claims) three (reflexivity), four (ideal role taking), and five (sincerity) of the public sphere. Criteria one and six of the public sphere – autonomy from state and economic power; and discursive inclusion and equality – were analyzed as part of the qualitative critique.<sup>4</sup> As I worked my way through the data, additional patterns emerged to represent some behaviour that I had not set out to code. For these patterns, I used an emergent code, M = Moderated. This code is instrumental in discussing issues of access and inclusivity.

Indications of moderation were coded in order to determine the frequency of its appearance and how this may or may not affect the



discussions on the forum. Altogether, there were only four instances showing that a moderator deleted a post. It is important to note that there are multiple levels of comment moderation on the forum. The implications of these multiple levels of moderation are discussed later in this chapter and in chapter four. The CBC website states that most comments are moderated prior to being posted on the forum.<sup>5</sup> The corporation also announced changes to user comments in a separate post.<sup>6</sup> See Appendix D and E for details of how the CBC handles forum users' comments.

### **Data Analysis**

Using the assigned codes (see Appendix B), I looked for information that would give insights into participants' expectations about the election issues, level of participation on the forum, the limited personal information supplied by the participants, which articles generated the most and/or least comments, as well as the relevance of the comments to the initial article under which they appear.

For each of the 28 articles under review, I reached data saturation at 25 comments (except for stories #24 and #28, which have 5 and 11 comments respectively). Similar patterns were emerging in most of the comments, for example: withholding of personal information, attempts at civility and sincerity, accusations of Liberal slant and partisanship by forum participants, distrust of party platforms and candidates' promises, references to past elections and policies proposed by candidates, and blatant cynicism

concerning Canada's electoral system, voter participation, and citizens' apathy towards political events.

### **Section 1: Managing Deliberation and Discussion**

In this section, I used the four codes of on-topic, off-topic, flaming, and moderation to assess the criteria of deliberation and discussion. These four features are deemed essential because they are fundamental characteristics that a forum and its participants should possess prior to going into the secondary levels of autonomy, validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, and inclusivity that make up the six criteria proposed by Habermas. When applied to the postings, these four codes give insight into the basic form of the deliberations and discussion occurring on the CBC News forum.

Generally, statements that were on-topic helped move the discussion along and enriched the forum. Participants making on-topic statements typically displayed a fair amount of knowledge regarding the issues being discussed. Off-topic statements were often cynical, sometimes denigrating, and frequently made the discussion veer away from the main topic(s) under deliberation. Flaming statements are those that could further derail the discussion or be considered inflammatory. It is worth noting that such statements were significantly rare considering the cloak of anonymity afforded participants. It would appear that the participants' own self-policing often rescued the discussion. A common tactic displayed by some participants was to simply ignore the flaming attempt and move on to discuss

the original topic of the article. Moderation of comments was rare but this is arguably due to the fact that some of the comments received initial vetting by CBC staff before being published on the website.<sup>7</sup> See Appendix D for additional information on moderation.

### **And What Shall We Do About Trolls?**

I opted not to do an extensive literature review on the subject of trolls because it is not directly related to the focus of my work. However, I am aware of the challenge trolls pose to discussions in online forums. Trolling is “the act of posting inflammatory, derogatory or provocative messages in public forums.”<sup>8</sup> Anonymous posters may choose obscure handles (username, profile name) but can no longer lay claim to total anonymity. When push comes to shove and there is an absolute need to identify a poster, there are now diverse tools available for this task. In addition, laws have been updated in most countries to enable the prosecution of crimes committed online.

Julie Zhuo, an Op-Ed contributor with the *New York Times*, reports the case of Liskula Cohen, who “persuaded a New York judge to require Google to reveal the identity of an anonymous blogger who she felt had defamed her, [...] Carla Franklin persuaded a judge to force YouTube to reveal the identity of a troll who made a disparaging comment about her.”<sup>9</sup> Zhuo also records efforts being made by content providers themselves – including Engadget, Reuters, Gizmodo, Facebook, and Disqus – to ensure that their platforms are not hijacked by trolls to foster hate speech and other forms of inflammatory behaviour that may result in defamation.

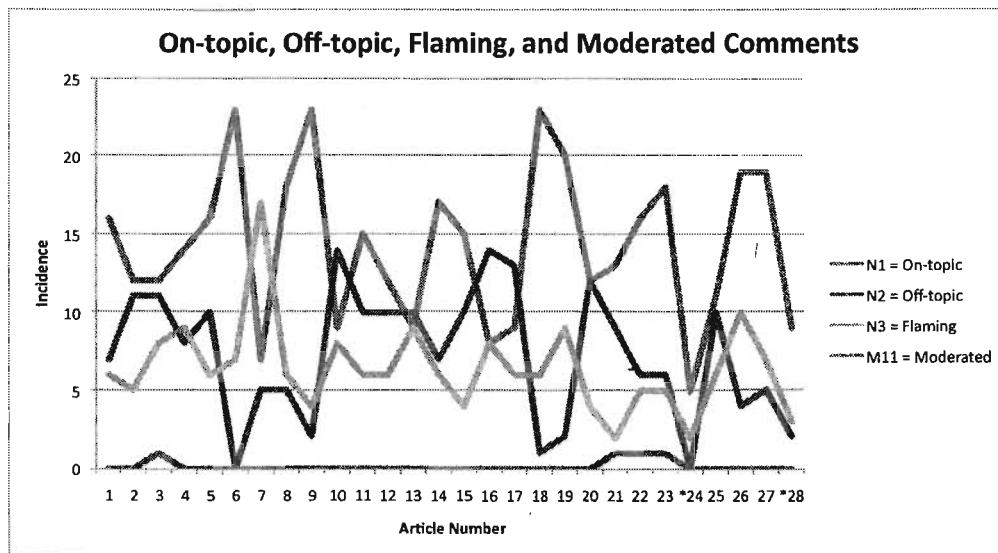
Granted, in the case of accessing websites via public computer stations or even shared home or office networks, it is difficult to immediately identify the specific individual. However, the Internet Protocol address<sup>10</sup> (IP#) assigned to each computer as it is routed through the networks of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have now made it easier to trace the origin of activities occurring online. Brian Stelter presents this information more succinctly,

The collective intelligence of the Internet's two billion users, and the digital fingerprints that so many users leave on Web sites, combine to make it more and more likely that every embarrassing video, every intimate photo, and every indelicate e-mail is attributed to its source, whether that source wants it to be or not. This intelligence makes the public sphere more public than ever before and sometimes forces personal lives into public view.<sup>11</sup>

With this kind of surveillance in place, I would argue that perhaps the concern about trolls disrupting deliberations on political online forums is less relevant than it once was and should be shelved.

**Table 3.1 Data Overview**

Article #s	Total comments per story	% of comments coded
1	411	6.08
2	166	15.06
3	313	6.08
4	26	96.15
5	743	6.08
6	70	35.71
7	208	6.08
8	50	50.00
9	1974	6.08
10	1085	2.30
11	1105	6.08
12	1458	1.71
13	185	6.08
14	306	8.17
15	2405	6.08
16	150	16.67
17	1155	6.08
18	41	60.98
19	124	6.08
20	2261	1.11
21	202	6.08
22	38	65.79
23	168	6.08
*24	5	100.00
25	70	6.08
26	4210	0.59
27	199	6.08
*28	11	100.00
Total	19139	



**Figure 3.1 On-topic, Off-topic, Flaming, and Moderated Comments**

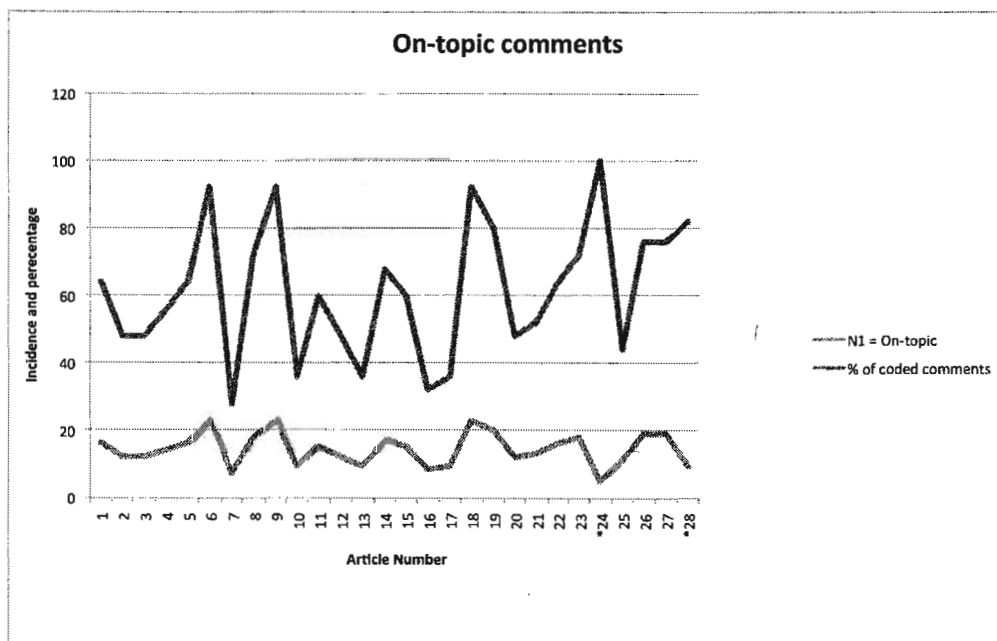
**Table 3.2 Frequency of occurrence of on-topic, off-topic, flaming, and moderated comments**

Article #s	Analytical categories and numbers of occurrence							
	N1 = On-topic	% of coded comments	N2 = Off-topic	% of coded comments	N3 = Flaming	% of coded comments	M11 = Moderated	% of coded comments
1	16	64	7	28	6	24	0	0
2	12	48	11	44	5	20	0	0
3	12	48	11	44	8	32	1	4
4	14	56	8	32	9	36	0	0
5	16	64	10	40	6	24	0	0
6	23	92	0	0	7	28	0	0
7	7	28	5	20	17	68	0	0
8	18	72	5	20	6	24	0	0
9	23	92	2	8	4	16	0	0
10	9	36	14	56	8	32	0	0
11	15	60	10	40	6	24	0	0
12	12	48	10	40	6	24	0	0
13	9	36	10	40	9	36	0	0
14	17	68	7	28	6	24	0	0
15	15	60	10	40	4	16	0	0
16	8	32	14	56	8	32	0	0
17	9	36	13	52	6	24	0	0
18	23	92	1	4	6	24	0	0
19	20	80	2	8	9	36	0	0
20	12	48	12	48	4	16	0	0
21	13	52	9	36	2	8	1	4
22	16	64	6	24	5	20	1	4
23	18	72	6	24	5	20	1	4
*24	5	100	0	0	2	40	0	0
25	11	44	10	40	6	24	0	0
26	19	76	4	16	10	40	0	0
27	19	76	5	20	7	28	0	0
*28	9	81.82	2	18.18	3	27.27	0	0
Total	400		204		180		4	

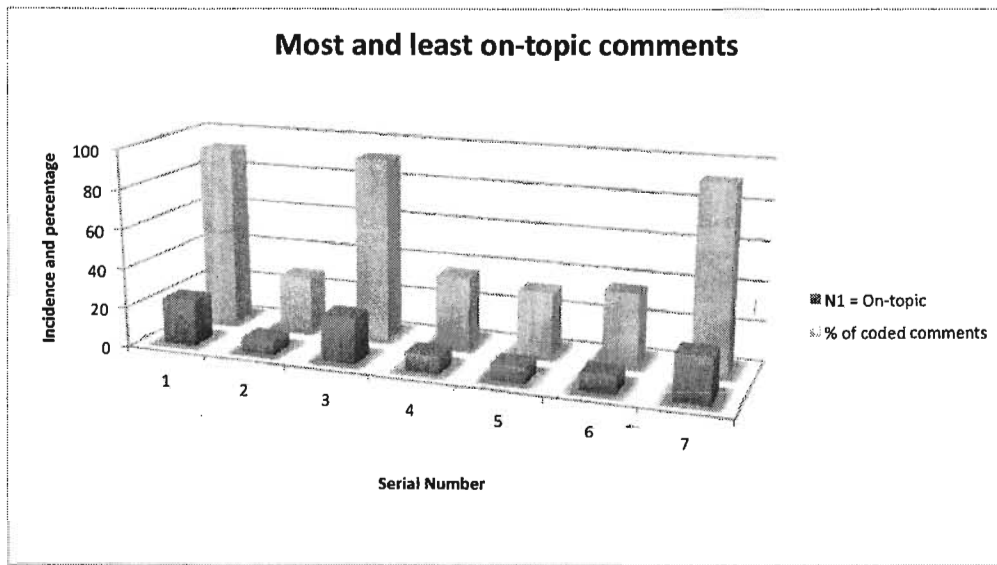
**N1=ON-TOPIC:** The on-topic postings have the highest number of occurrence (in table 3.2). There were three articles with the highest number of this feature overall. These are article #6 (Election Misses Mark with Students<sup>12</sup>), article #9 (Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening<sup>13</sup>) and article #18 (Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service<sup>14</sup>) with 23 points each. Participants were engaging in a focused manner with most of the issues under discussion. This is perhaps a reflection of their understanding and investment in the campaign and election issues. However, the level of critical engagement may not be as deliberative as Habermas would expect of a political forum that aims to foster a national public sphere for its citizens. I return to this observation in section two of this chapter.

Interestingly, topics discussed in article #7 (Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says<sup>15</sup>), article #10 (Harper Ready 'to hit the Ground Running'<sup>16</sup>), article #16 (Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures<sup>17</sup>), and article #17 (Liberal Vote Only Way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff<sup>18</sup>) had a lower occurrence of on-topic comments (in figure 3.2). Considering the key issues identified leading up to the election campaign season, one would expect stories about the leaders' platforms (articles #16 and #17) to have more focused discussion and critical contribution from the participants. However, it appeared as though participants defied this logic, choosing instead to pay attention to the issue about rally screening (article #9, in figure 3.3), which could be counted as more about style rather than substance.





**Figure 3.2 On-topic comments**



**Figure 3.3 Most and least on-topic comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #6 Election Misses Mark with Students

2 = #7 Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says

3 = #9 Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening

4 = #10 Harper Ready 'to hit the Ground Running'

5 = #16 Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures

6 = #17 Liberal Vote Only Way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff

7 = #18 Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service

**N2=OFF-TOPIC:** Off-topic statements were second highest in terms of frequency of occurrences (in figure 3.4). Notably, the code was applied 204 times, compared to 400 for on-topic utterances. The two articles with the highest number of off-topic postings are article #10 (Harper Ready ‘to hit the Ground Running’<sup>19</sup>) and #16 (Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures<sup>20</sup>). Two examples of off-topic postings are from article #8 (Green Party Leader First to Stop in Calgary<sup>21</sup>) in which participant *TMensa* posted:

Found a nice site <http://sowhatdidimiss.blogspot.com/>  
(A8P3)

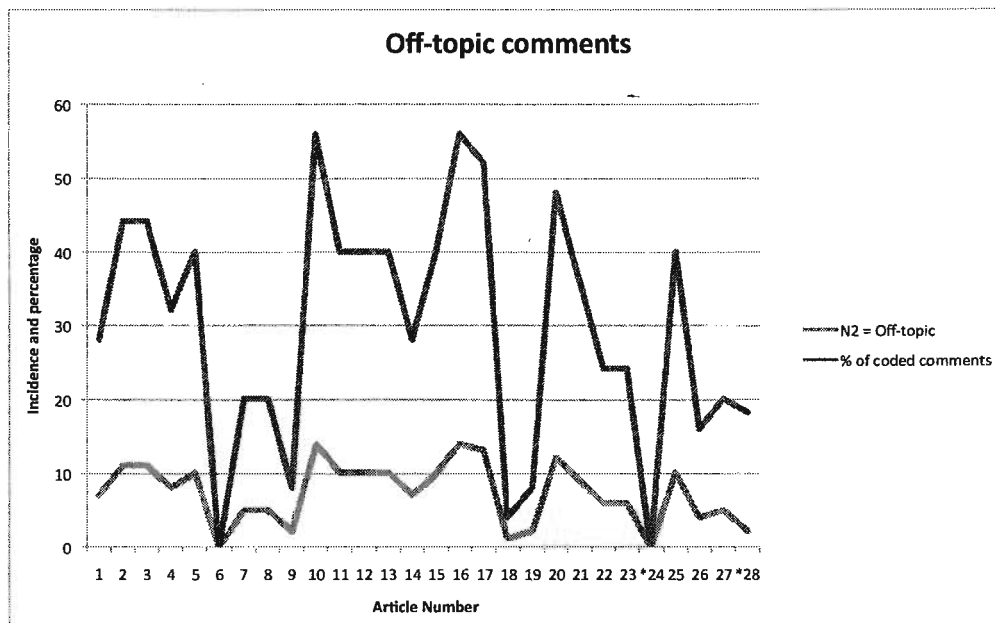
and article #25 (The House: The Twitter Election<sup>22</sup>) in which participant *AngryBuddha* even acknowledges that the post is irrelevant:

I just tried the ‘Vote Compass’. I answered my questions following the Green Party’s platform on every question except one. Turns out I’m Liberal. Sorry for the irrelevant post but I am officially pissed this election. (A25P3)

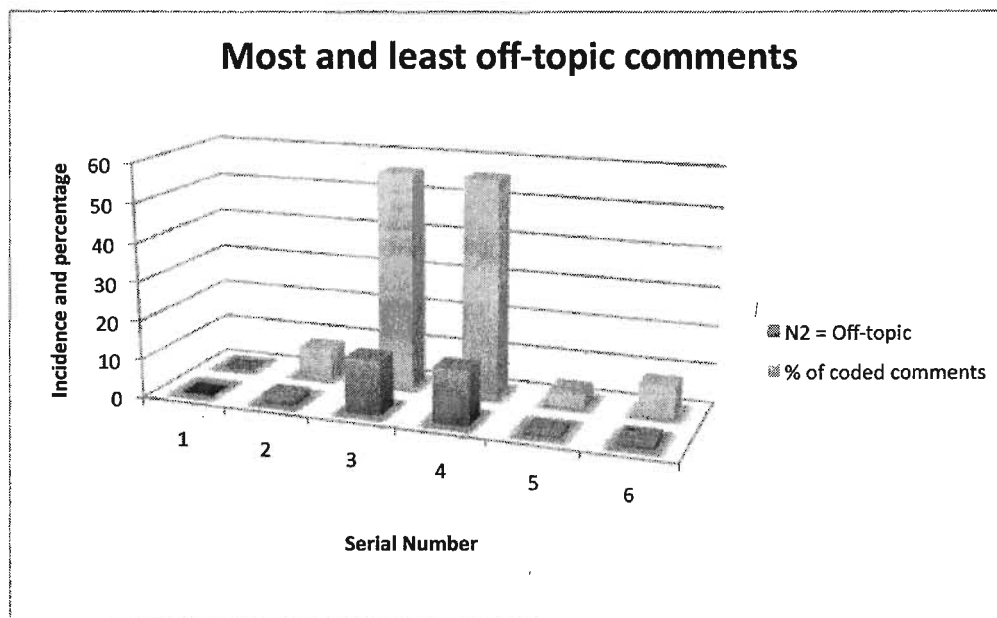
Overall, participants appeared to stay on-topic on most of the issues being discussed except for the occasional injection of sarcasm, humour and, sometimes, outright rage (coded as flaming) directed at other participants or the issues in the articles.

Stories that had fewer occurrences of off-topic comments from participants are: article #6 (Election Misses Mark with Students<sup>23</sup>), article #9 (Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening<sup>24</sup>), article #18 (Liberals Target

Faster Rural Internet Service<sup>25</sup>), and article #19 (May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push<sup>26</sup>). Article #6, which is about students' voting patterns stayed on-topic (in figures 3.4 and 3.5).



**Figure 3.4 Off-topic comments**



**Figure 3.5 Most and least off-topic comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #6 Election Misses Mark with Students

2 = #9 Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening

3 = #10 Harper Ready 'to hit the Ground Running'

4 = #16 Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures

5 = #18 Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service

6 = #19 May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push

**N3=FLAMING:** In coding the data, I observed that direct response to flaming was rare. Examples of two occurrences of this are from article #4 (CBC in Nunavut Blasted for Nixing Election Forum<sup>27</sup>) in which participant *Farout* posted:

That's a funny comment from a pre 2006 whiner. (A4P3)

That post is in response to *Kanata* who posted:

Why is it that all we hear from the left is whining and complaining? (A4P3)

and article #5 (Coalition Questions Return to Campaign<sup>28</sup>) in which *Gerry F* posted:

RockOutNL: You are very amusing. You must agree, however, that Ignatieff is the weakest leader the Liberals have had in history. They could have at least picked somebody that lived in this country for awhile. (A5P2-3)

That is in response to *RockOutNL* who posted:

I'm starting to think that you're a paid Conservative agent. Harper is a proven liar, and also openly pays people to post Conservative friendly comments on national message boards. I can assure you, on the contrary, that I'm a private citizen and that, like the rest of my intelligent and concerned countrymen, I'll be voting against Mr. Harper's continued abuse of this nation. (A5P2-3)

These exchanges are, at another level, an indication that posters do return to follow-up on the opinions expressed, although again this did not show up consistently in all the articles reviewed. An example of such return is in

article #5 in which a participant with the handle *Drydocked* was very active on the thread. In such cases, the flaming potentially acts as bait when and if other forum participants take it up.

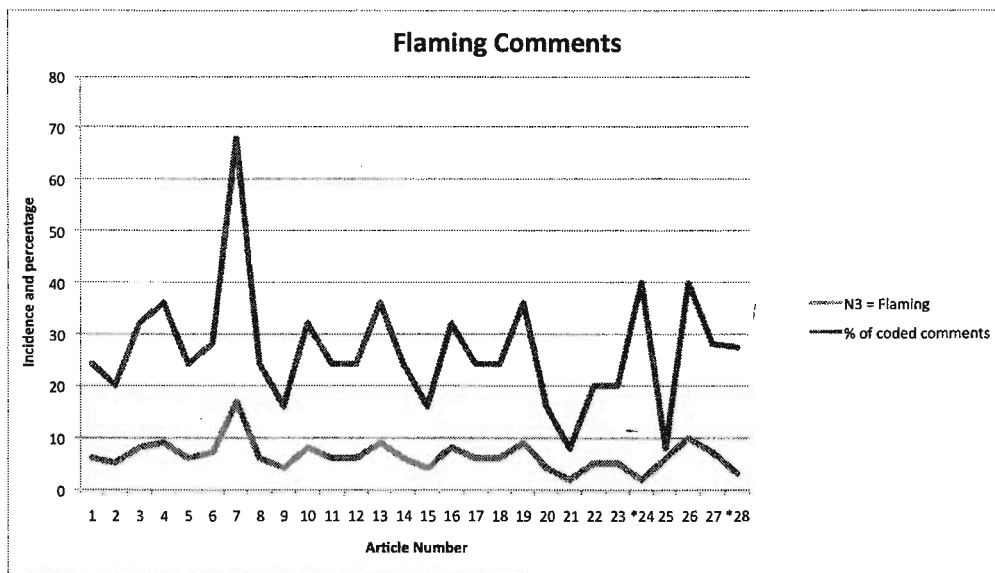
Examples of sustained and high percentage of flaming are in article #7 (Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says<sup>29</sup>) and article #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>30</sup>). Flaming occurred in all of the articles selected for analysis but was rarely taken up by the next poster or even the person to whom it was directed (in figures 3.6 and 3.7). This low level of response is arguably a rarity on a public forum since most forums face the challenge of keeping discussions on topic due to the obviously identifiable postings of flammers as well as the less easily identified, but presumably omnipresent trolls. This could be connected to the moderation system CBC has in place, since it is possible that some comments made in response to objectionable or suspicious postings may not have made it to the forum in the first place. Such comments may have been withheld at the first-level of moderation by CBC staff, just as a quashed flaming or troll-like posting might have been.

Article #21 (NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence<sup>31</sup>) and article #24 (Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches<sup>32</sup>) have the least number of flaming incidents at two occurrences each (in figure 3.7). What was going on in article #7 (Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says<sup>33</sup>) and article #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>34</sup>), in which there were 17 and 10 incidents of flaming respectively? Could there be a link to trolls here

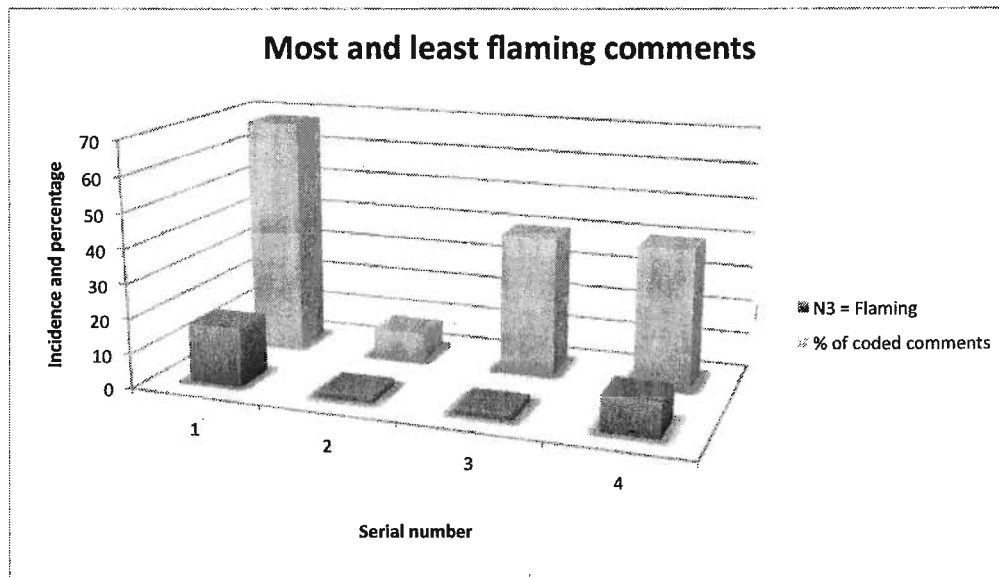
as well? If so, are they there just to disrupt deliberation and distract other participants or are they genuinely interested in the issues and attempting to make their voices heard?

While I would argue that making inflammatory comments is not an ideal way to have your voice heard in a forum, it should be noted that statements made in a forum all contribute to the formation of a discursive community. When considering moderating this kind of activity on an online forum, one wonders what the public would think about having the frequent use of sarcasm and bombast that goes on in Parliament cut from Hansard. The public record of Parliamentary debate is intended to be complete — warts and all — and it seems reasonable to expect the same of online forums. Hateful speech, slurs, and expletives are likely a different matter but much of the sarcasm and *ad hominem* attacks that are considered to be “flaming” in online forums is, in the context of Parliamentary debate, accepted as part of the process (albeit a rather distasteful part).





**Figure 3.6 Flaming comments**



**Figure 3.7 Most and least flaming comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #7 Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says

2 = #21 NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence

3 = #24 Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches

4 = #26 Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early

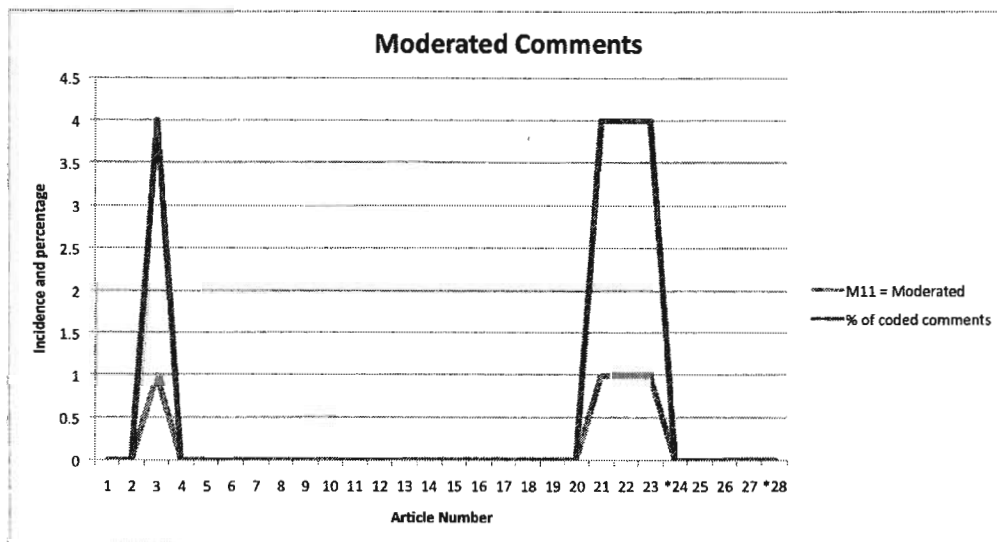
**M11=MODERATED:** I coded for comment moderation. CBC acknowledges that most comments are moderated before they are posted. However there are also incidents of a moderator removing comments (and making a posting to show that the comment has been removed) after the fact. There are only four cases of such deletion of comments out of a total of 666 comments that I coded (in figure 3.8). This level of moderation occurs when forum participants report the comments as offensive or inflammatory.

Such comments are then deleted and this deletion is indicated, but such activity by the moderator is rare. A question that arose for me when reviewing the data is, who determines what is considered offensive or inflammatory? Specifically, evidence of moderator activity appeared in article #3 (Cagefighter, Bartender, Musician among new MPs<sup>35</sup>), article #21 (NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence<sup>36</sup>), article #22 (Nunavut Ex-Premier named Liberal Candidate<sup>37</sup>), and article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>38</sup>) (in figure 3.9). In each of these cases, this notice appears under the participant's name:

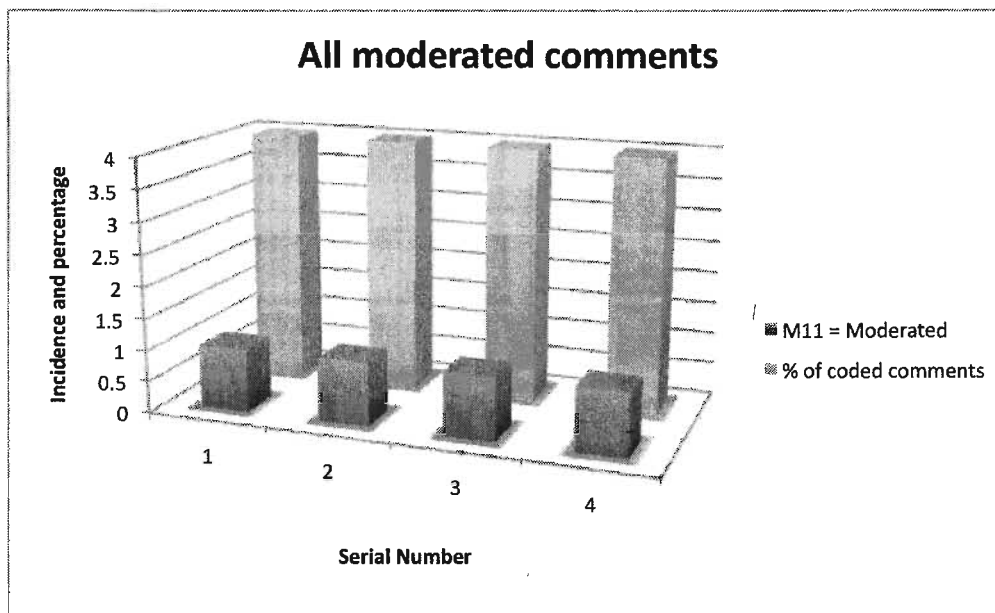
*This comment and related replies have been removed by the moderator.*

Overall, the discussion was generally “too civil” compared to some other forums. Prior to reading the notice on CBC website that some comments are moderated before being published, I perceived the presence of a moderator. It was obvious to me that some comments did not make it to the forum in the first place, although I could not delve further into this observation within the

parameters of my study. Another key observation is that all but one of the four articles that had the moderator comment is about the NDP. The moderator notice appeared once in each instance under these articles (in figure 3.9).



**Figure 3.8 Moderated comments**



**Figure 3.9 All moderated comments**

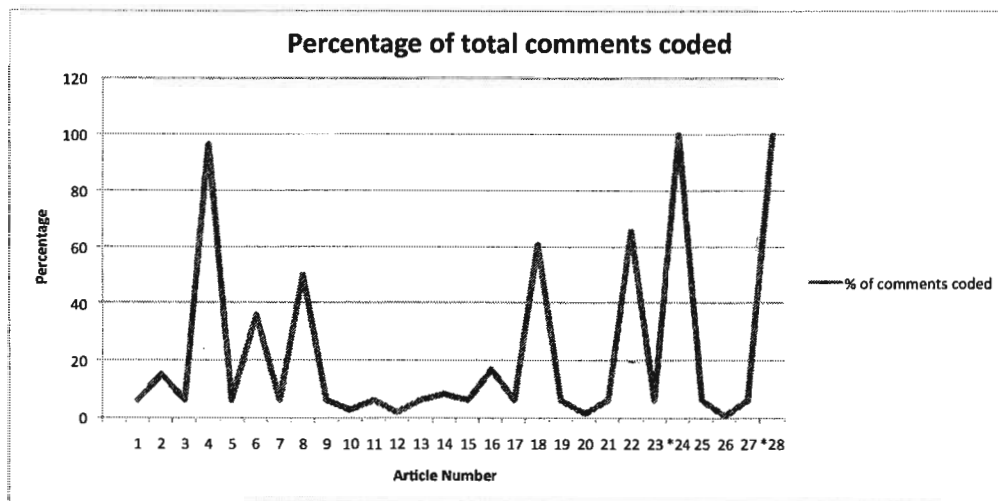
Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #3 Cagefighter, Bartender, Musician among new MPs

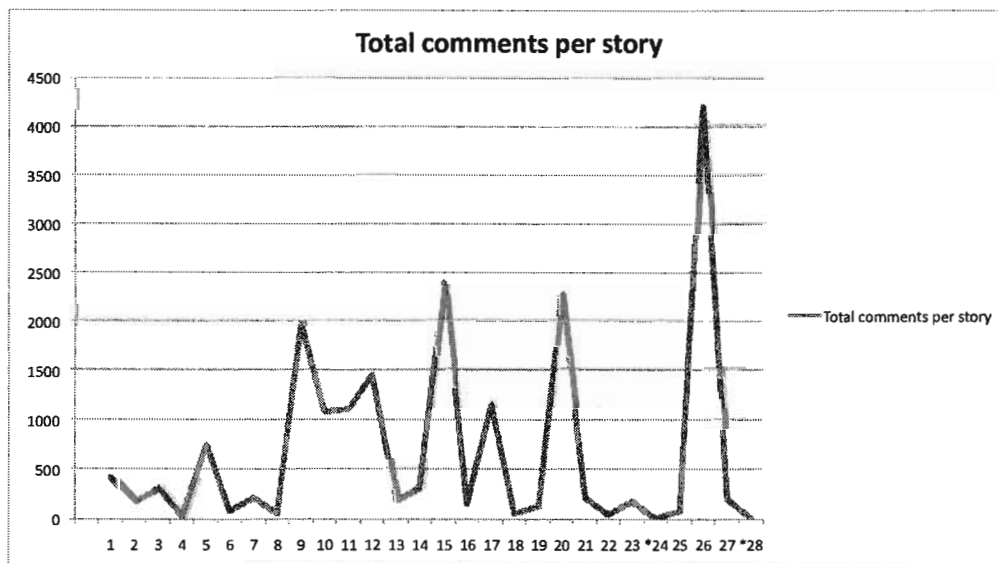
2 = #21 NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence

3 = #22 Nunavut Ex-Premier Named Liberal Candidate

4 = #23 Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality



**Figure 3.10 Percentage of total comments coded**



**Figure 3.11 Total comments per story**

## SECTION 2: Validity Claims, Reflexivity, Ideal Role Taking, and

### Sincerity

The four criteria of validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, and sincerity were coded in this section. This is part of the quantitative analysis. When coding the data for these four criteria, I looked for statements that could fulfill the expectations laid out for each of them. Statements that fit criterion two (exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims) feature attempts by participants to go beyond merely giving their opinions and actually supplying additional information to support it. An example is *express123* who posted in article #16 (Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures<sup>39</sup>):

Got any proof of your 12% buddy? And let's not forget the financial crash was caused by unchecked greed mainly out of the US banking system. Was that not corporate welfare when the taxpayers had to bail out the business sector again. It's not the first time. And just how much are the corporate tax cuts, the mega prisons and the F35 gliders going to cost... (A16P2-3)

For criterion three (reflexivity) in almost all the 28 articles reviewed, except two, participants made efforts to be reflexive. A statement was coded as being reflexive when it was clear that a participant had attempted to contextualize their assumptions and interests within the larger framework of Canadian society. I did notice however that not all the characteristics of reflexivity appeared in most of these statements. While most of the

statements coded as reflexive tend to examine cultural values and interests, not many of them acknowledge their assumptions about some of the issues being discussed. An example of a reflexive comment is the one posted by *YoungZaphod* in article #1 (2 Bloc Members Support NDP<sup>40</sup>):

For goodness sake be careful and check the latest numbers for your riding. In my riding, the NDP and the Green candidates have ENDORSED the Liberal candidate for the win, because with our demographics, he's the only one who can take down our (terrible) Conservative incumbent. If my neighbours are not paying attention, their third party votes will send that incumbent back to Parliament. *The reality is that in my area, the third parties DON'T WANT MMY VOTE.* (A1P4) [italics mine]

This omission of reflection on participants' assumptions raises the issue of whether or not it is important that every facet of each criterion must be seen in the statements in order for those statements to fit the criterion under which they are coded. I address this in more detail in the discussion section.

Criterion four (ideal role taking) appeared fairly consistently in all of the articles except one (in table 3.3). There were clear indications of participants acknowledging other interlocutors in the discussion. Two examples of statements that fit the ideal role taking criterion are:

I'll agree with you on that. Modern conveniences are generally late getting to the rural areas and, of course, more so in some places as compared to others but that is just the way it is. It is the price you pay for being rural.

That was posted in article #18 (Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service<sup>41</sup>) by *northernproven* in response to *JayPeeCee*, who wrote:



Stay out of things that don't concern you Mr. Ignatieff and let the private sector deal with it... (A18P5)

And the dialogue in article #2 (Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog

Post<sup>42</sup>) between *CalmOne* and *eigenman\_bc* in which the former wrote:

Sorry CBC, I must have missed something... where exactly does it state Arcade Fire said don't vote Tory? Or was this a headline to stir the masses.

And then the latter responded:

...Maybe you're right...if you agree with everything this government has been saying, the above comment is actually promoting their action. After all, it was Harper that said (paraphrasing) that "when he's done with Canada, we won't notice it anymore." (A2P2-3)

All 28 articles coded featured comments fitting criterion five (sincerity), though mostly the first half of the elements of this criterion are evident in the statements (in table 3.3). Participants appear to be sincere in giving certain information about themselves. For example, participant *User.Name* posted:

More I hear from Ignatieff, more annoying it gets. Harper will not be getting my vote no matter what, so I guess I'm leaning towards NDP at the moment. Still, it's so difficult...mountainous dilemma in this year's federal election...just because all my options are SO POOR!

And participant *sstrand013* wrote:

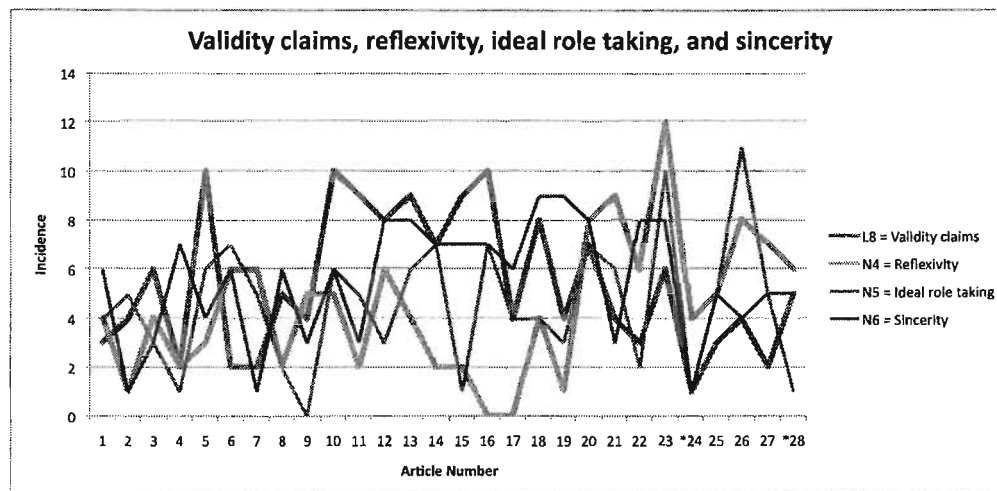
I have a bias towards anyone who feels that they are "entitled", any candidate not being involved in the process is a huge problem, and I would not vote for those ones not there. (A14P4)

While these two comments certainly indicate the participants' intentions and interests, their needs and desires are not reflected. This is a common trend in most of the statements coded as displaying sincerity. It appears the requirement that "each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information"<sup>43</sup> is utopian for a forum that permits anonymity. The same phenomenon was observed in relation to the criterion of reflexivity.

However, the absence of all of the characteristics of any given criterion (in this case, sincerity) in statements such as these does not make the participants any less sincere (or reflexive) than if they had given more information about themselves (or the issue).

**Table 3.3 Frequency of occurrence of validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, and sincerity**

Analytical categories and numbers of occurrence								
Article #s	L8 = Validity claims	% of comments coded	N4 = Reflexivity	% of comments coded	N5 = Ideal role taking	% of comments coded	N6 = Sincerity	% of comments coded
1	3	12	4	16	4	16	6	24
2	4	16	1	4	5	20	1	4
3	6	24	4	16	3	12	3	12
4	2	8	2	8	1	4	7	28
5	10	40	3	12	6	24	4	16
6	2	8	6	24	7	28	6	24
7	2	8	6	24	5	20	1	4
8	5	20	2	8	2	8	6	24
9	4	16	5	20	0	0	3	12
10	10	40	5	20	6	24	6	24
11	9	36	2	8	5	20	3	12
12	8	32	6	24	3	12	8	32
13	9	36	4	16	6	24	8	32
14	7	28	2	8	7	28	7	28
15	9	36	2	8	1	4	7	28
16	10	40	0	0	7	28	7	28
17	4	16	0	0	4	16	6	24
18	8	32	4	16	4	16	9	36
19	4	16	1	4	3	12	9	36
20	7	28	8	32	7	28	8	32
21	4	16	9	36	6	24	3	12
22	3	12	6	24	2	8	8	32
23	6	24	12	48	10	40	8	32
*24	1	20	4	80	1	20	1	20
25	3	12	5	20	5	20	5	20
26	4	16	8	32	11	44	4	16
27	2	8	7	28	5	20	5	20
*28	5	45.45	6	55	1	9.09	5	45.45
Total	151		124		127		154	



**Figure 3.12 Validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, and sincerity**

**N8=VALIDITY CLAIMS:** “Deliberation involves engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticizable – are open to critique rather than dogmatically asserted.”<sup>44</sup> This criterion was present in all the articles I coded. Some examples of validity claims are:

Article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>45</sup>) in which *ShaneDavis* posted:

The majority of the press includes the newspapers in this country, right?  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newspaper\\_endorsements\\_in\\_the\\_Canadian\\_federal\\_election,\\_2011](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newspaper_endorsements_in_the_Canadian_federal_election,_2011) Because if you’ll take a look here, you’d be hard-pressed to explain how 6 of 35 newspapers represents the majority. I mean, if it was a first-past-the-post situation, I supposed the few could rule the many just fine. (A23P2)

Article #13 (Ignatieff Underlines \$1B Family Care Plan<sup>46</sup>), in which *Woodrov* posted:

As a History prof, Ignatieff likely understands how the “Trickle Down” theory of economics has failed over and over. For whatever reason, Harper continues to try and run a country on this failed theory. It’s like the Russian Communists... they try at a failed system for decades. The supply-side economic theory does not hold water for one very simple reason: Greed. Corporations are not good social citizens, that’s why I used the Shaw example. They just posted record earnings in a quarter, gave their former CEO a \$500,000 per month pension then FIRED 500 employees... (A13P6)

Article #10 (Harper Ready ‘to hit the Ground Running’<sup>47</sup>), in which *widman* posted:

Majorities become insular and don’t listen to the people. They become runaways that end having to be evicted. As much as I want the NDP platform to become part of govt policy, I am

wholly opposed to any party ever getting a Majority again, left right or center. We need a govt that can be controlled, reigned in, or pushed. We need a govt that is responsive and representative. We need to be able to push them towards electoral reform. We won't get that from a Majority of any creed! Go to this link: "<http://catch22campaign.ca/>" to help you figure out which candidate in your riding has the best chance of defeating the CONs. If we all do this, then we will help the NDP be part of the govt instead of relegating them to the Opposition in a CON Majority. (A10P2)

Article #21 (NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence<sup>48</sup>), in which *Koby1Kanoby* posted:

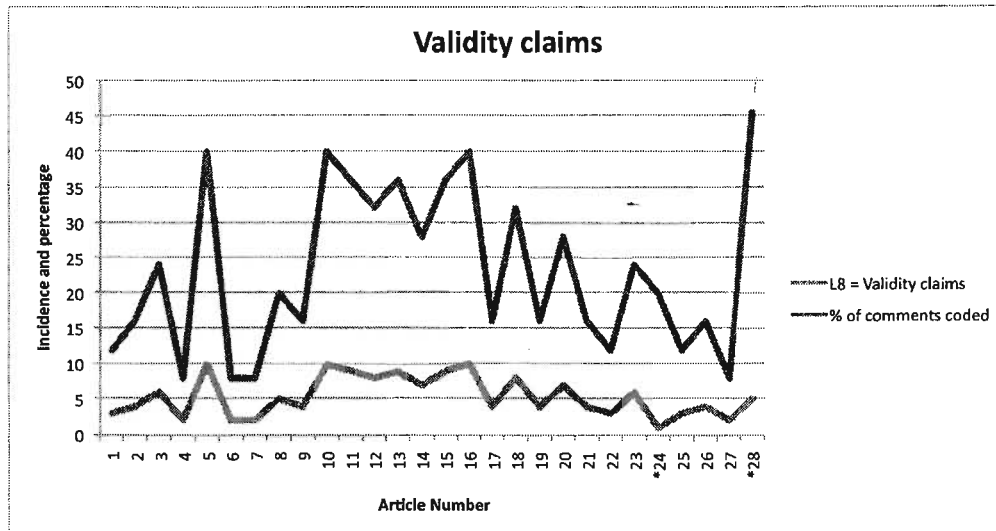
"I just don't understand where Jack is coming from. I don't see how you say, 'We've got a government that is corrupt, but you know maybe we can get better health care'. I don't follow the logic. It would be like me saying 'Well the government is corrupt, this is an opportunity to get tax reduction'. Well you know we might get tax reduction, but we still don't think a corrupt party should be running the government of Canada."  
Stephen Harper – 2005 (A21P4-5)

In coding the data, parts of some statements coded for validity claims could also be coded for reflexivity. Most participants tend to reflect on their "cultural values, assumptions, and interests"<sup>49</sup> simultaneously as they get involved in reciprocal critique, with examples of why they are making such assertions. I should caution that participants did not necessarily reflect on all these three elements consistently. The validity claims being made sometimes suggest that people reflect more often on "the larger social context"<sup>50</sup> while discussing their individual experiences (or lack thereof) of politics and governance in the country.

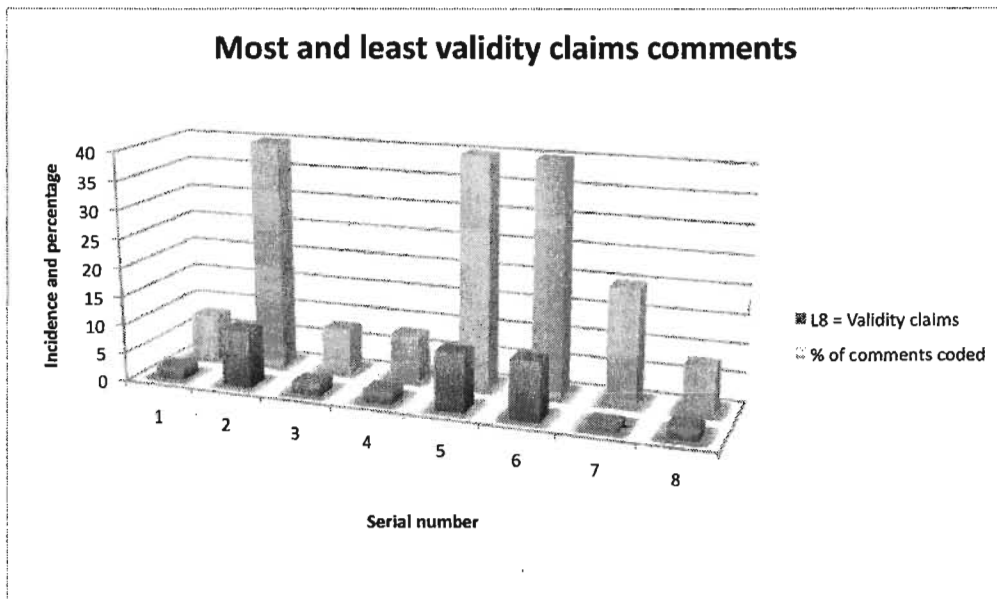
Article #5 (Coalition Questions Return to Campaign<sup>51</sup>), article #10 (Harper Ready ‘to hit the Ground Running’<sup>52</sup>) and article #16 (Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures<sup>53</sup>) have the highest number of validity claims while article #24 (Social Media: the Leaders’ Speeches<sup>54</sup>) has the lowest number of validity claims (in figure 3.14). As a stand-alone criterion, it was rather difficult to code for validity claims because this criterion strongly requires dialogical elements that would involve some sort of sustained exchange between two or more participants. This is not often the case, as most participants tend to simply post their comment without engaging in reciprocal critique of other participants’ opinions. This appears to be a common practice in online forums.<sup>55</sup> Some of the comments that I coded as validity claims would feature opinions that are *criticizable* but are not necessarily *critiqued* by other participants.

An example of deliberation in this context is in article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>56</sup>) wherein a group of participants took an aspect of the Conservative platform that was attacked by one participant and then proceeded to have a relatively protracted argument about it. Some of the participants supported their arguments with information from external sources while engaging in reciprocal dialogue. It appears that where participants preface their statements with another participant’s handle, there is almost always likely to be a form of reciprocal critique. Though this did not often take the form of an ongoing dialogue, the response by one

participant to another suggests that they have indeed engaged with one another's primary points of argument.



**Figure 3.13 Validity claims comments**



**Figure 3.14 Most and least validity claims comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #4 2 Bloc Members Support NDP

2 = #5 Coalition Questions Return to Campaign

3 = #6 Election Misses Mark with Students

4 = #7 Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says

5 = #10 Harper Ready 'to hit the Ground Running'

6 = #16 Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures

7 = #24 Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches

8 = #27 Vote Compass Passes 1 Million Mark



**N4=REFLEXIVITY:** “Participants must critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.”<sup>57</sup> Habermas expects participants to critically examine their “cultural values, assumptions, and interests” when engaging in public sphere deliberation. When coding the data, I noticed there is little evidence of critical examination of these three elements by the participants. I did encounter a strong indication of an awareness of “the larger social context” in the comments posted by most of the participants. An example is drawn from article #21 (NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence<sup>58</sup>) in which *Squirreldancer* posted:

...On the other hand, I seem to remember quite a few supporters of the Reform Party (fore-runners of the current Conservative Party) who were interested in having the West separate.  
(A21P3)

This poster’s reflection is anchored more on social context (he or she let the comment stand alone) rather than examining their own “cultural values, assumptions, and interests.” Few postings exhibit all three elements of reflexivity consistently. It seems that participants choose instead to discuss issues in broad terms and to connect those broadly framed issues to generic social contexts.

Article #16 (Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures<sup>59</sup>) and article #17 (Liberal Vote only way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff<sup>60</sup>) have no occurrences of reflexivity (in figure 3.15). Could this be connected to the

topics of the articles in anyway? Article #2 (Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog Post<sup>61</sup>) and article #19 (May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push<sup>62</sup>) have one occurrence each of reflexivity. One might speculate that this low number of reflexivity is linked to the topics being discussed. It appears that when participants perceive certain values deemed “Canadian” are at stake, they tend to be more reflexive than when the topic is not about a presumed national identity and/or values. Participants attempt to defend communal ideals that speak to issues of identity, for example Canada as a peace-keeper, the public healthcare system, and Canada as a multicultural society. Examples are drawn from:

Article #20 (NDP Deputy Leader Doubts Bin Laden Photos Exist<sup>63</sup>), in which *guystone* posted:

The NDP received as many seats as they did because they just told everyone they would get everything they wanted and it would come from big banks and oil companies. That’s simply not reality. I predict the Liberals will take back most of the NDP seats in the next election (provided they get a real leader that isn’t a total disaster like the last two and that certainly excludes Bob Rae and Justin Trudeau). (A20P2)

Article #21 (NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence<sup>64</sup>), in which *Squirreldancer* posted:

Okay, you got me. Where in the NDP platform does it say Object: Split up the country? Moreover, what could possibly be the reason the NDP would want to split up the country?... (A21P3)

Article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>65</sup>), in which *HankBurnaby* posted:

...In BC, our new Liberal party leader referred to the NDP, after the federal election, as something like the Quebec New Democrats. That Quebecers have a far different view on the way our society should work, that we should serve all people with respect and dignity, is something to be embraced, not shunned. Jack Layton and Thomas Mulcair are about to really prove their political astuteness. I feel confident they can do that, while recognizing they will not be able to expect much media support. Let us hope the NDP can show that ethics does matter! The majority of the Canadian media seem perfectly content to let Stephen Harper avoid responsibility for his actions and those of his MPs. Go, Jack, go! (A23P1)

It is interesting to note that article #24 (Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches<sup>66</sup>) and article #28 (Your Answers: What Kind of Election do you think Canada Votes 2011 has been?<sup>67</sup>), though with only 5 and 11 comments, have four and six occurrences of reflexivity (in figure 3.15). Why is this? Perhaps it is the nature of the headlines and topics of the stories as well as the question asked in article #28 specifically. It is difficult to engage with the topics in these two articles without being reflexive. In article #24, *Bill Hamilton*<sup>8</sup> posted:

The amazing aspect of the election is that the Harper Conservatives were able to secure a majority in spite of the obvious bias of the media against the Harper Conservatives. It is especially shameful that the publically funded CBC, who should be politically neutral, are so biased against the Conservatives in their political coverage. It is a credit to the Canadian public at large, that they can see beyond the very strong influence of the media in making their decisions. (A24P1)

Then *Chucker05* wrote:

In all honesty I think I am largely displeased that Duceppe is done. As a politician he conducted himself with a politeness and patience that did every Canadian proud. If not for the

whole Quebec-sovereignty-thing I would have voted for him over any candidate (even though I'm in Calgary). A24P2)

And in article #28, *penseur* posted:

Doris Lessing once wrote a book about the group-think phenomenon – that public opinion is only what people have been taught is safe to think out loud. What has amused me, is the evidence that this phenomenon has infected the so-called shapers of public opinion – the pundits. They are clearly utterly confounded by the display of independence of thought and judgement displayed by Canadians. For me, the astounding phenomenon is not Jack, but that Canadians have decided to own their own minds.

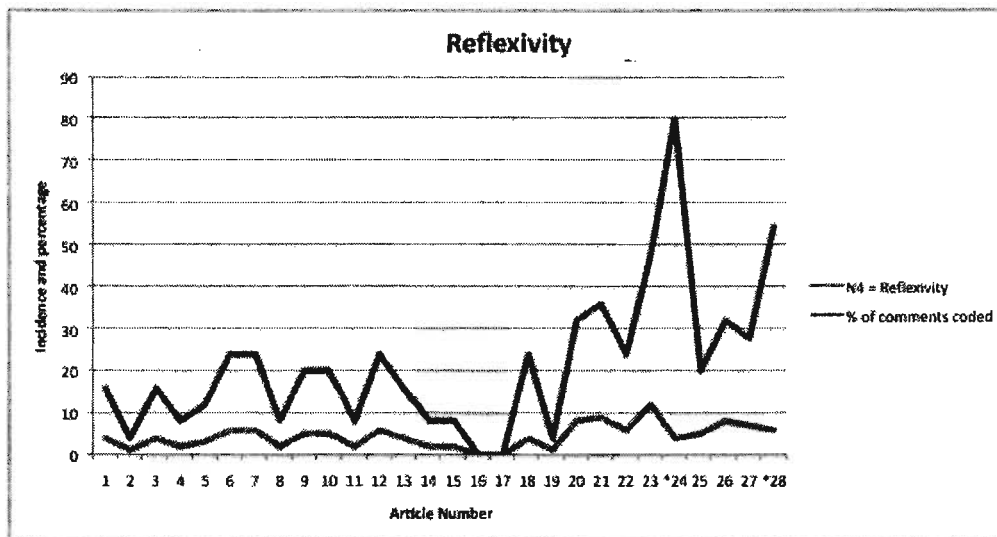
Then *Carbon99* wrote:

So common55 [referring to another participant] states that because Ontario had an NDP government that built up a huge debt in a recession, that they will vote for the Conservatives, who built up even more debt during a booming economy. The Conservative strategy of screwing the economy while giving tax cut to the rich, then blame the other guy, seems to work. The exact same strategy that has worked so well for the GOP and has screwed up the US for a lifetime if not longer. There is a better option than both. Vote Liberal, who have a strong record of balancing the books, delivering strong social programs and growing the economy. Imagine where we'd be right now without the surplus they left Harper and the strongly regulated Canadian banks which Harper opposed. (A28P1-2)

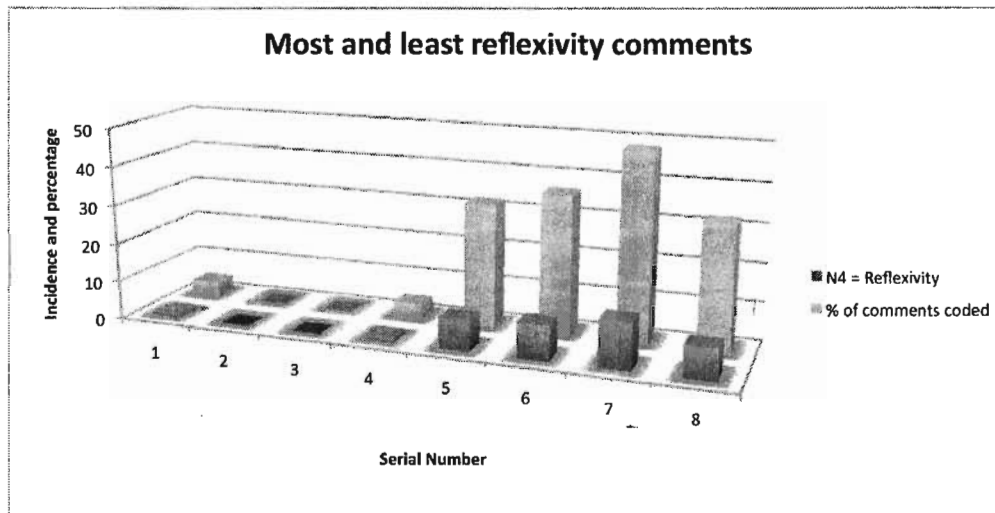
And then *the wonder dog* posted:

The CBC only acknowledges parties that already have a seat. That is hardly opening up things for discussion. It leaves people believing that only one of those four parties can be voted in. It does not address how countries end up limited by a two party system such as the USA. What happens when neither is worth voting for. They would have been better off stating well in advance of a debate that only people who got a certain percentage of total votes or an actual number of votes could participate. Of course merging of two countries was not discussed because Canadians in general still feel that they have

an identity of their own – a Canadian identity. The liberals and conservatives were trying not to discuss medicare for that reason. They would rather avoid “fixing the health care system” because it will be expensive and if they can get Humana, Revere and other HMO’s involved it will become a non issue. (A28P2)



**Figure 3.15 Reflexivity comments**



**Figure 3.16 Most and least reflexivity comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #2 Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog Post

2 = #16 Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures

3 = #17 Liberal Vote Only Way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff

4 = #19 May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push

5 = #20 NDP Leader Doubts Bin Laden Photos Exist

6 = #21 NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence

7 = #23 Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality

8 = #26 Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early

**N5=IDEAL ROLE TAKING:** “Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the other’s perspective. This requires a commitment to an ongoing dialogue with difference in which interlocutors respectfully listen to each other.”<sup>68</sup> There were quite a few occurrences of this criterion in the postings on the forum. Indications of ideal role taking include: a participant quoting another participant or using another participant’s handle to preface his/her posting. Some examples are drawn from article #1 (2 Bloc Members Support NDP<sup>69</sup>) in which participant *InfoJunkie83* specifically prefaces his/her comment with *@youngzaphod*, the handle of another participant who had posted a comment prior to *InfoJunkie83*’s. Participant *YoungZaphod* then replies by starting his post with *Infojunkie83* (A1P4). This practice occurs fairly consistently in all of the 28 articles, except in article #9 (Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening<sup>70</sup>), in which there was no occurrence of a participant using another participant’s handle (in figure 3.17). Other ways that participants fulfill this criterion is by engaging in dialogues that reveal that they are taking one another’s opinions into consideration, even though they may not necessarily agree with those opinions. In article #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>71</sup>), *chuck1960* posted:

Excellent pot – Wray 101... [referring to the previous poster]  
good to someone flush the con/reform out of the weeds : )  
(A26P5).

In article #6, *TfnJohn* wrote:

If I remember the federal Elections Act correctly spoiled ballots are tossed and not counted. While I like your idea under current rules I don't think it would work.

*TfnJohn* was responding to *Durandal* who posted earlier:

It would be best for democracy to show up and destroy her ballot instead of not voting at all. This way she is counted as having "voted" but not counted as a supporter for any of the parties. If all the non-voting CDN's did this, the percentages of support for parties would drop dramatically. It would be interesting to see how they would react.

Another participant, *NedLimpopo* then responds to *Durandal* as well, even though the latter's handle was not mentioned:

A spoiled ballot does not officially count. You have to refuse your ballot, not spoil it. Then it becomes officially counted.  
(A6P2)

Another example of participants attempting to be respectful and understanding even in disagreement is in article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>72</sup>). Participant *Larcadie* posted a fairly long comment:

The NDP's victory in Quebec is a shot across the bow of the good ship English Canada. French Canada has now gone out on a limb saying, "We want change!" Quebec's NDP is simply the sovereigntist movement making its first (and perhaps last!) attempt at bringing about change within a federal framework.

After 4 years of being ignored, however, it will become abundantly clear to them and to Quebecers that federalism does not work for French Canada and the cries for separation will be louder than ever in this province. Harper may not know it but if Quebec's NDP is ignored, Harper will be the last Prime Minister to be recognized by Quebec.



What happened to the Liberals? The majority of Quebec's Liberals are French and left of center while those in Ontario are English and right of center. Liberals in Ontario refused to join the orange wave and split the vote that allowed for a majority Conservative government. Thus, given the option, Ontario's liberals chose to support right-wing conservatism and repudiated left-wing liberalism. Thus, on the first night of an orange revolution, Quebec already has its first indications that English Canada refused to recognize French Canada as its equal. Over the next 4 years, this impression will solidify in the minds of French Canadians and the clamour for separation will become ever louder and more insistent.

As I said, a shot has been fired across the good ship English's bow. That shot was fired off during Gilles Duceppe's resignation speech. On CBC's English channel, not one among a panel of commentators made reference to his message of warning in deference to its English audience. How ostrich-like!

As I say, English Canada has been served notice! Some of you boys have got to get out more, or at least learn a little French. (A23P3-4)

That post was followed by direct comments from 10 participants including *wpeters* who wrote:

Thats okay but dont expect any \$\$\$, you want your independence then make your own.

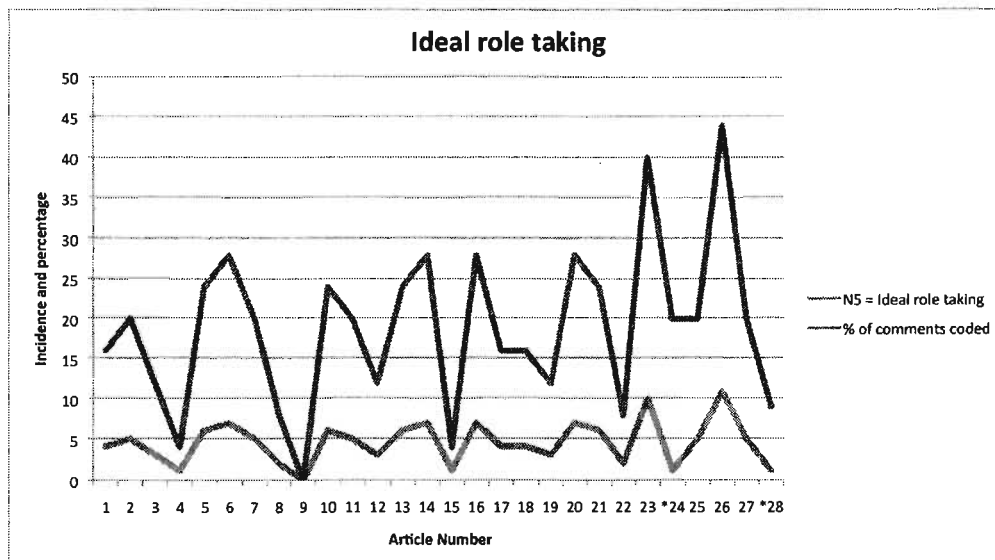
*Kate Ayres'* response:

Hello Lacardie, I agree – if the Conservatives ignore the NDP values and positions, Quebec will probably develop renewed and permanent enthusiasm for separation. If Harper's advisors are smart, they'll see that compromise with the NDP will be smart way to go, and the best way to bring out the best across the country.

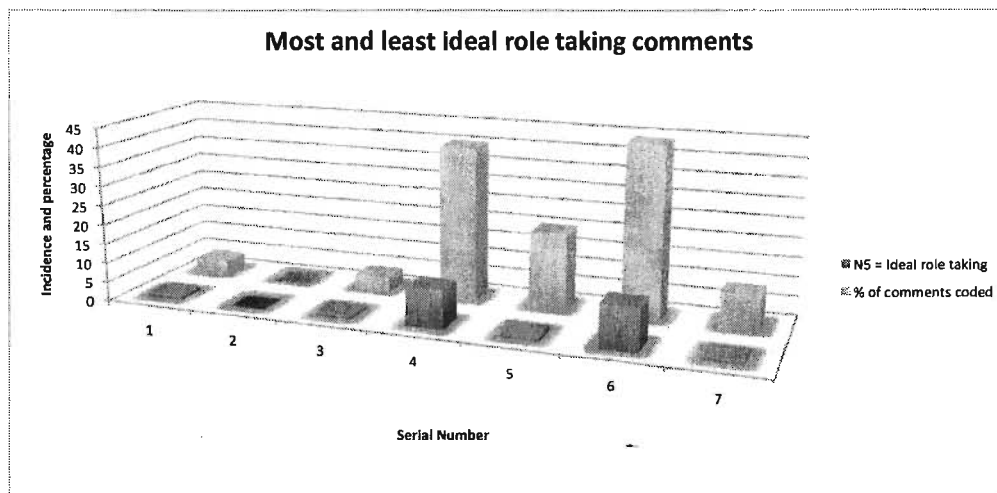
*Statler* then wrote:

Kate and Larcadi – A surge in the separatists' support may be the only moderating influence on Harper. But I doubt Harper can stop the separatists. To do so would require a major Mulroney-style betrayal of his western base, and that's not likely to happen. I can't see Quebec remaining in Canada to the end of Harper's term unless Harper grants Quebec significant new powers.

Overall, most participants tend to acknowledge other participants' positions on the issues prior to stating their own. However, this acknowledgement does not preclude them from making dogmatic assertions. In some cases, the ideal role taking would appear to be more of a sarcastic jab at the other participant's statement prior to stating one's own position on the topic being discussed.



**Figure 3.17** Ideal role taking comments



**Figure 3.18 Most and least ideal role taking comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #4 CBC in Nunavut Blasted for Nixing Election Forum

2 = #9 Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening

3 = #15 Layton Turns Attacks Back on Rivals

4 = #23 Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality

5 = #24 Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches

6 = #26 Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early

7 = #28 Your Answers: What kind of Elections Do You Think Canada Votes

2011 Has Been?

**N6=SINCERITY:** “Each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information – including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires – as relevant to the particular problem under consideration.”<sup>73</sup> It is important to focus on the last part of the definition of sincerity. Sincerity often showed in the form of participants flagging their party preference based on expressed contempt for other parties. An example is drawn from article #4 (CBC in Nunavut Blasted for Nixing Election Forum<sup>74</sup>) in which *Maxx* wrote:

I am from Calgary I consider myself a Progressive  
Conservative I have NEVER Voted Liberal. (A4P3)

Looking through the scanty “all information” supplied by some of the participants, one could assume that some of the information is genuine. This is especially the case when a statement is contextualized by a participant as playing a part in the formation of an opinion related to issue(s) being discussed. To fully measure for the elements of sincerity one may need to hear directly from the forum participants. Moreover, neither the CBC News platform nor the article topics require such detailed information from participants. Hence forum participants are not compelled to supply the information. Perhaps a requirement of non-anonymity on this forum would bolster sincerity on the part of the participants.

There is no evidence of “all information” being supplied by participants in most of the comments that I coded for sincerity. That said, there were

certainly fragmented bits and pieces of personal information scattered throughout the comments, even if no single posting could be said to display all of the reflexivity criterion's elements ("true intentions, interests, needs, and desires"). A few examples of this fragmented information is drawn from article #14 (Layton Defends Against 'Stop-Gap' Candidates<sup>75</sup>), in which *ssstrand013* posted:

...I have a bias towards anyone who feels that they are "entitled", any candidate not being involved in the process is a huge problem, and I would not vote for those ones not there.  
(A14P4)

Article #17 (Liberal Vote only way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff<sup>76</sup>), in which *Carefull* wrote:

The Liberals were the alternative voice to the Conservatives. I think the reason to support the Liberals is more to help Mr. Ignatieff keep his job. As a long time NDP supporter, it is hard to believe that the vote to defeat Harper is likely with the NDP. It feels good, but I simply want to show Mr. Harper the door – as for a majority – love to see a parliament composed of a party, or more likely parties with more than 50% of the vote. (A17P1)

Article #19 (May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push<sup>77</sup>), in which *ChuckB* posted:

Last election I voted for Briony Penn, a Liberal, and the time before I voted NDP, each time hoping that that candidate would be the one to defeat Gary Lunn. Please join me in voting for Elizabeth May of the Green Party this time. She has by far the best chance of sending the odious little snigger of a man packing, and depriving Harper of a majority. Go Elizabeth!  
(A19P4)

Article #25 (The House: The Twitter Election<sup>78</sup>), in which *frogman1943*

wrote:

lets stop all this polling. It has no use. Who do these people poll anyways? I am 68 and i never been polled And I dont know anyone who has. let the public decide not because of some poll. (A25P2)

And article #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>79</sup>), in which *BRoberts*

posted:

The TFSA is very popular with all Canadians the work hard and try to save for retirement. Not all people who work have a lucrative pension plan like the Ontario Teachers or the CAW Some don't have anything at all. This will allow them to save some money with out being taxed to death. What's wrong with that. *I will have no pension plan except CPP and this is a great way for me to save something. As a small business owner I applaud this initiative.* (A26P4) [italics mine]

In the foregoing instances, participants indicate their intentions and interests, but not necessarily needs and desires.

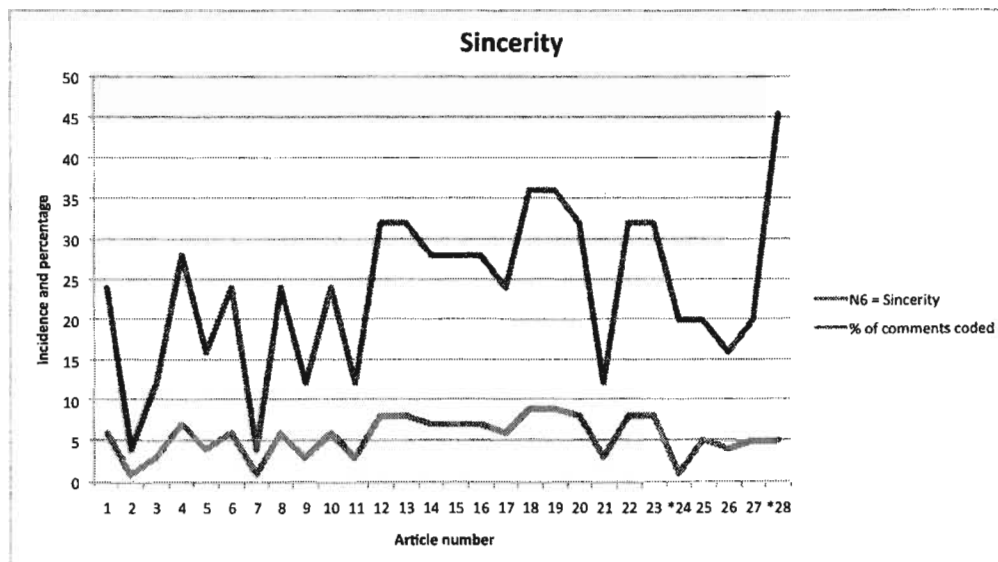
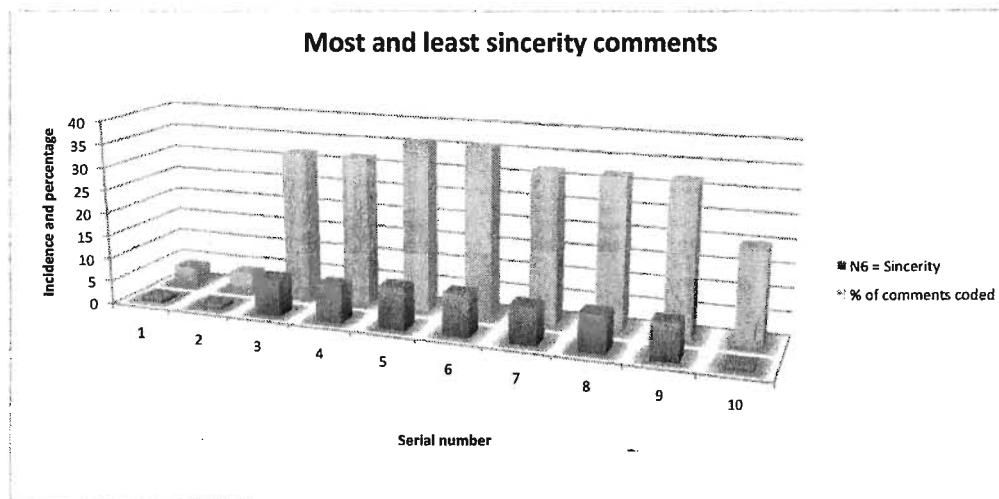


Figure 3.19 Sincerity comments



**Figure 3.20 Most and least sincerity comments**

Serial Number = Article Number:

1 = #2 Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog Post

2 = #7 Fantino Resignations Don't 'Sit Right,' Ignatieff Says

3 = #12 Ignatieff Defends Foreign Voting Record

4 = #13 Ignatieff Underlines \$1B Family Care Plan

5 = #18 Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service

6 = #19 May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push

7 = #20 NDP Leader Doubts Bin Laden Photos Exist

8 = #22 Nunavut Ex-Premier Named Liberal Candidate

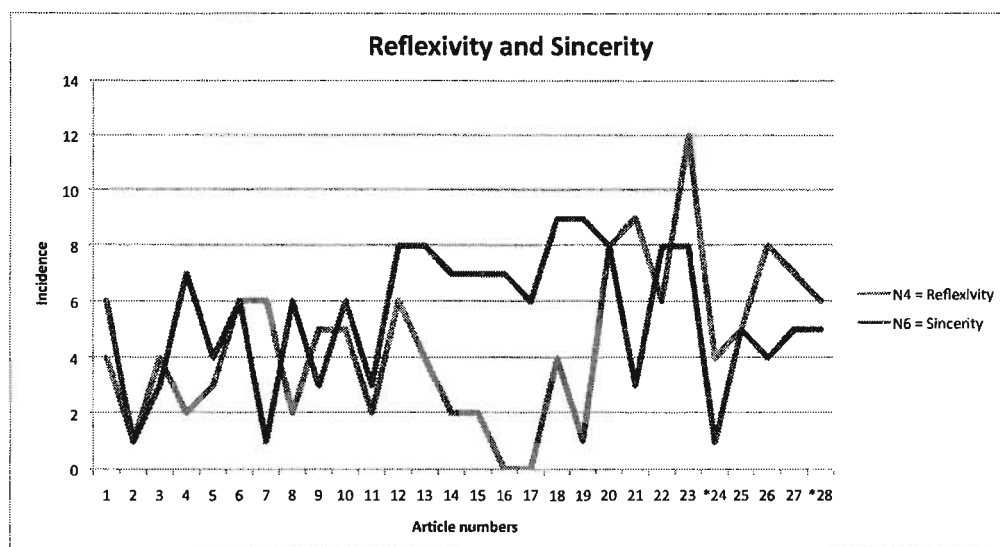
9 = #23 Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality

10 = #24 Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches

### Cross-examination of the Six Criteria of the Public Sphere

Due to similarities I observed in some of the criteria of the public sphere, a cross-analysis of four of the criteria was conducted in order to reveal how the multiple characteristics interacted or manifested on the CBC News forum.

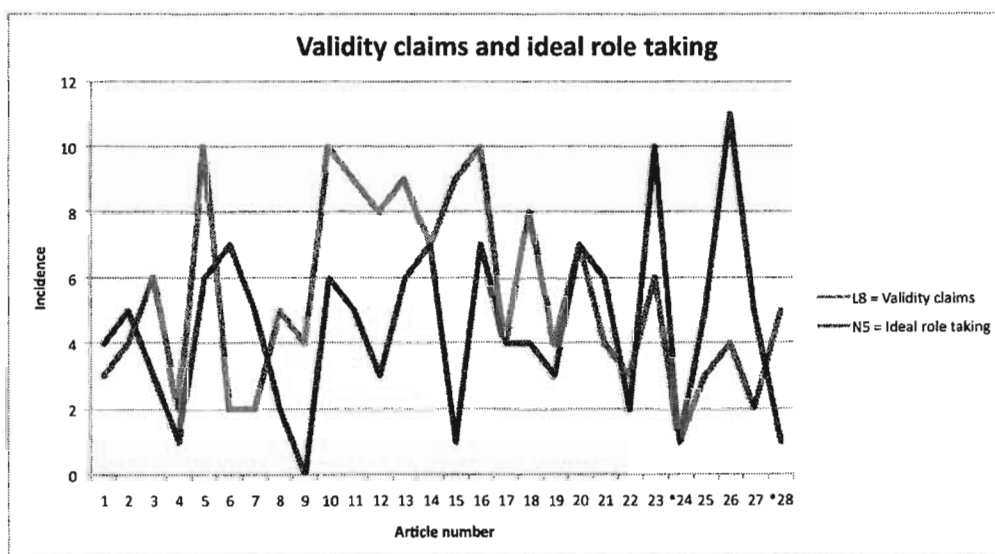
Figure 3.21 cross-examines the criteria of reflexivity and sincerity. The data indicates a pattern that suggests that these two criteria are often in conflict. It seems that when participants are reflexive, they are not equally sincere — especially since they tend to withhold information like their needs and desires in relation to the issue being discussed. It is necessary to note however that this conflict between reflexivity and sincerity may be due to the format of the CBC News platform, the topics being discussed, and the people participating on the forum.



**Figure 3.21 Reflexivity and sincerity**

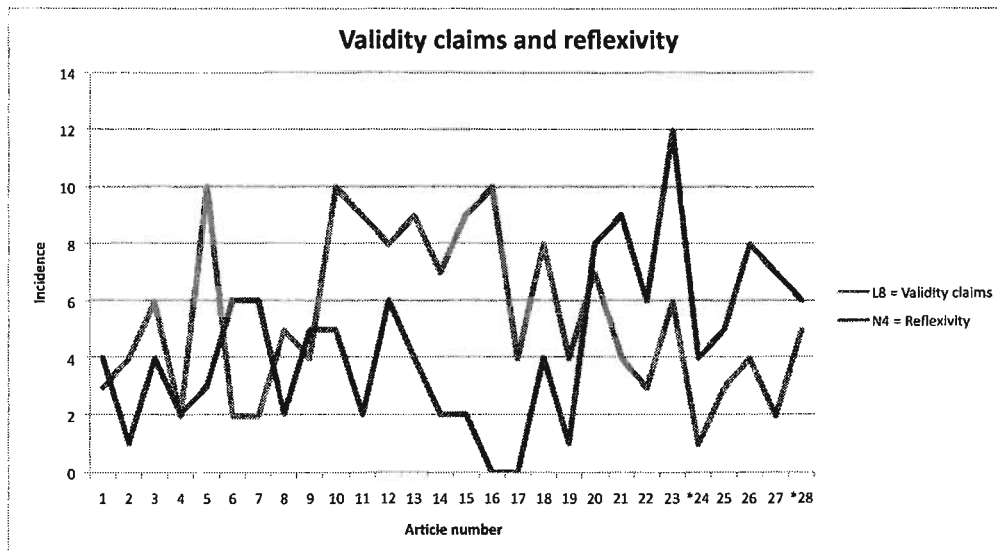


Figure 3.22 cross-references validity claims and ideal role taking by participants on the forum. For article #5 (Coalition Questions Return to Campaign<sup>80</sup>) and article #10 (Harper Ready 'to hit the Ground Running'<sup>81</sup>), these two criteria are coded in 10 and 6 instances respectively, article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>82</sup>) has 6 instances of validity claims but 10 of ideal role taking, while article #14 (Layton Defends Against 'Stop-Gap' Candidates<sup>83</sup>) has an equal amount of the two criteria at 7 instances each. This suggests that even in making validity claims, participants are still fairly understanding, though in most cases the ideal role taking is consistently average.



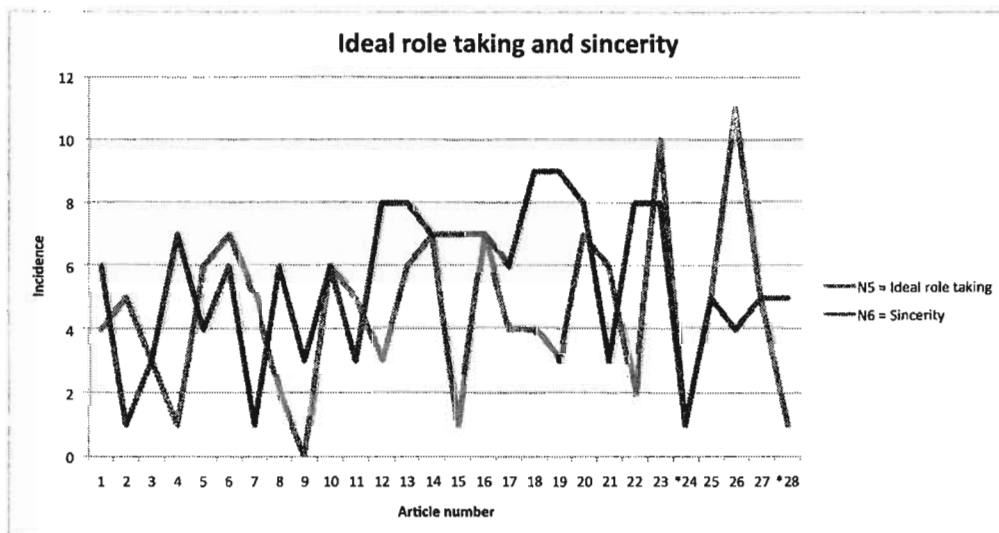
**Figure 3.22 Validity claims and ideal role taking**

Figure 3.23 shows the cross-analysis of validity claims and reflexivity. Participants engaged in reciprocal exchange of ideas in all the 28 articles and appear to be reflexive while doing so. There is a clear indication of participants' awareness of their cultural values and most participants made attempts to situate their discussion within larger social contexts, as opposed to isolating the issues. There are a few instances where the occurrence of validity claims is low compared to reflexivity and vice versa. Article #5 (Coalition Questions Return to Campaign<sup>84</sup>) has 10 validity claims while reflexivity appears only 3 times. By contrast, article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>85</sup>) has 12 instances of reflexivity while it only has 6 of validity claims.



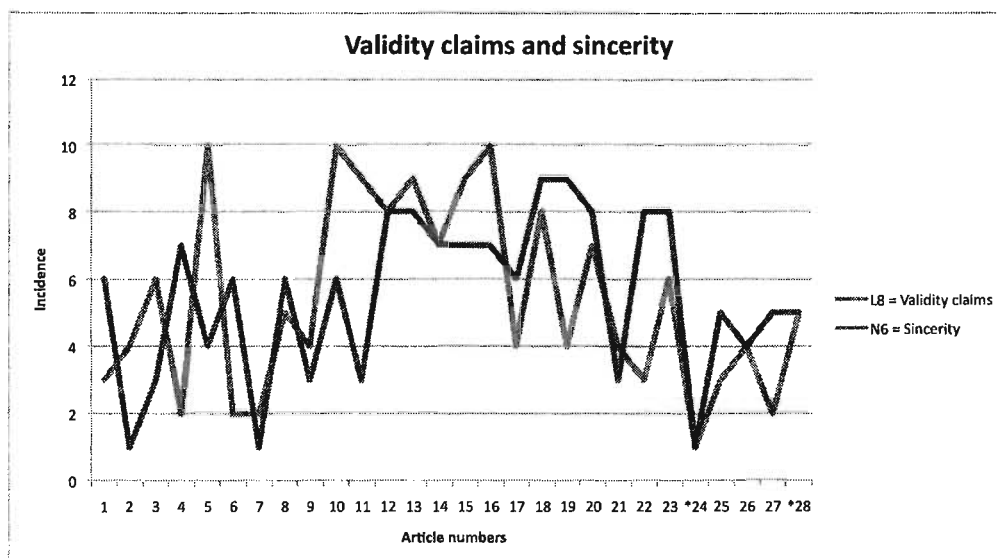
**Figure 3.23 Validity claims and reflexivity**

Figure 3.24 is for ideal role taking and sincerity. These two criteria appear to be fairly balanced in all the articles, except for article #4 (CBC in Nunavut Blasted for Nixing Election Forum<sup>86</sup>) and article #15 (Layton Turns Attacks Back on Rivals<sup>87</sup>), in which ideal role taking appears once and sincerity appears 7 times. By contrast, sincerity appears 4 times while ideal role taking appears 11 times in article #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>88</sup>). Again participants appear to be understanding, respectful, and fairly consistent in staying on top of the issues being discussed while simultaneously divulging some information about themselves and their investment in the issues.



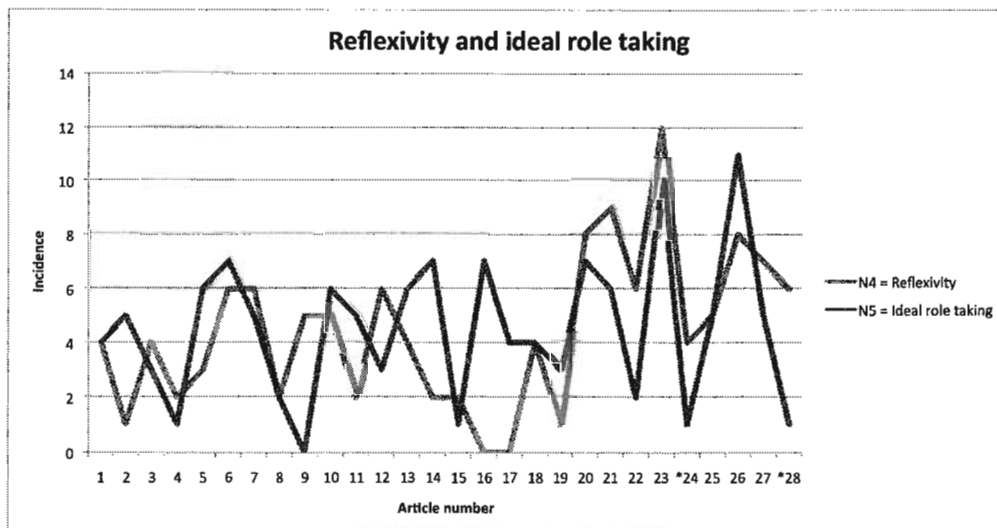
**Figure 3.24 Ideal role taking and sincerity**

Figure 3.25 cross-analyzes validity claims and sincerity. It appears that article #5 (Coalition Questions Return to Campaign<sup>89</sup>) features a low incidence of sincerity yet high value of validity claims, article #12 (Ignatieff Defends Foreign Voting Record<sup>90</sup>) features the same amount of both criteria while article #21 (NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence<sup>91</sup>) features about the same amount of sincerity and validity claims. This trend suggests that even though participants were making assertive and sometimes unsubstantiated points (dogmatic), they also attempted to supply some information about themselves (including indicating their intentions and interests) although it should be noted that their needs and desires were not expressed as frequently.



**Figure 3.25** Validity claims and sincerity

Figure 3.26 cross-references reflexivity and ideal role taking, and shows that article #2 (Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog Post<sup>92</sup>) has 5 instances of ideal role taking yet one instance of reflexivity, article #23 (Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality<sup>93</sup>) has 10 instances of ideal role taking and 12 of reflexivity, article #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>94</sup>) has 11 instances of ideal role taking and 8 of reflexivity, and article #16 (Leaders Face Questions About Their Futures<sup>95</sup>) has 7 instances of ideal role taking yet zero of reflexivity. I noticed that participants' attempts at being reflexive and considerate (ideal role taking) were fairly balanced in most of the discussions. Overall, one can trust participants to be fairly reflexive in their postings. However, flaming should be discouraged as much as possible in order to foster a stronger presence of these two criteria on the forum.



**Figure 3.26 Reflexivity and ideal role taking**

Overall, the trend from these charts (figures 3.21 to 3.26) indicates that participants who make efforts to enrich the discussion by bringing additional information to the forum also tend to be sincere in giving as much information about themselves (their party affiliation or cultural assumptions, for example). On the other hand, the pattern emerging in this cross-analysis also suggests that because people engage in ideal role taking does not necessarily mean that they are consistently reflexive in their comments.

### **SECTION 3: Autonomy, and Discursive Inclusion and Equality**

This section addresses the other two criteria of the public sphere. The first – autonomy from state and economic power – requires that “discourse must be based on the concerns of citizens as a public rather than driven by the media of money and administrative power that facilitate the operations of the market and state.”<sup>96</sup> The second – discursive inclusion and equality – expects that,

every participant affected by the validity claims under consideration is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever. Inclusion can be limited by inequalities from outside of discourse – by formal or informal restrictions to access. It can also be limited by inequalities within discourse, where some dominate discourse and others struggle to get their voices heard.<sup>97</sup>

These two criteria are analyzed qualitatively. If following Habermas’ ideal, one would expect a forum such as the CBC’s to be autonomous from the government and also unencumbered by economic interests.

#### **L7 = Autonomy from State and Economic Power**

This criterion is connected to the format of the CBC News forum, the forum’s ownership structure and source of funding. How does the forum’s status as a service provided by a publicly funded broadcaster, which relies, in part, on advertising revenue complicate its potential to help foster a public sphere for Canadians? Even though the CBC is a crown corporation that relies on taxpayers’ money, it operates at arm’s length from the government, thus arguably fulfilling the first part of the requirement of autonomy. That

said, economic forces may indeed influence the CBC because it also relies on advertising revenue to supplement the funding it receives from the government. In this context, the CBC does not entirely fulfill the criterion of autonomy. This shortcoming does not, however, make it any less a legitimate site of public discussion. This is especially the case when one considers Fraser's argument that it is virtually impossible for any public sphere to be completely free of these influences.<sup>98</sup>

In thinking through autonomy on the part of the forum participants, one would assume that participants are autonomous in that the CBC forum is openly available to all who can access it. Although participants need to register to use the forum, they are not *required* to reveal any personal information, which means that such things as political affiliation, ethnicity, class, gender, and age remain unknown unless the participants choose to self-identify according to these characteristics. This openness and permission to be anonymous can be viewed as an advantage for the CBC forum since most people are more likely to want to be heard and recognized without the burden of divulging their true identity. This means that participants can post without fear of reprisal or personal attacks based on socio-cultural characteristics. It may also explain why some participants make repeat appearances using the same handle or username.

### **L9 = Inclusion and Equality**

This criterion is a broad and generic requirement of the public sphere. It is more about the whole piece of the pie — intersecting factors of forum,



participants, types of deliberations, and broader issues of access — as opposed to coding distinctly for the elements of this criterion in individual comments. During coding, statements that fulfill part of this criterion were found in the data. However, I decided to engage this criterion qualitatively, using critical analysis, in order to examine all of its elements. Some examples of comments I considered under criterion six mostly had the element of lack of inclusivity from participants.

In a few of the articles, some participants appeared to be dominating the discussion because they made repeat appearances in quick succession to re-assert their claims. Examples are in article #11 (Harper Would Extend Fitness Tax Credit<sup>99</sup>) in which *LOLberal Party* clearly dominated the discussion right from the beginning. The participant provided a direct response to every initial post made by another participant (including making multiple comments in one case). Altogether, *LOLberal* made six comments on the same story within an hour.

While the CBC News forum is ostensibly openly accessible to anyone after they register, it presents as inclusive, but the forum does not fulfill the criterion of inclusion and equality in its entirety. The forum provides online services in English and French — unsurprising in a service with a mandate to be bilingual — but Canada is a multicultural society with large non-English and non-French linguistic communities. Those who need services in languages other than Canada's two official languages therefore lack the opportunity to engage in the deliberations on this forum in their primary

language. Admittedly, the CBC cannot provide services to participants in every language but the challenge of inclusion and equality remains a problem given the large size of some of Canada's linguistic communities.

Those who are proficient in either of the two official languages may nonetheless be restricted in different ways, including: a) the lack of the financial means of access, b) the lack of technological tools and/or skills related to computers and Internet connectivity, c) language competency barriers, and d) the requisite political knowledge necessary to engage in political deliberations online. People are thus potentially multi-disadvantaged and may not get an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing deliberations about national issues. It is important to note however that Papacharissi is firm in contending that access to the Internet does not equate to participation in the public sphere in general.<sup>100</sup> Hence, I am not making the argument that there is a correlation between lack of access and lack of participation.

As earlier noted, Brian Barry's concepts of "the starting gate" and "cumulative advantage and disadvantage" reminds one that some people may already be disadvantaged based on the circumstances of their birth; social class; and lack of basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing.<sup>101</sup> Nancy Fraser buttresses Barry's position with her attention to other categories of exclusion like gender.<sup>102</sup> These factors would challenge any accessibility rhetoric the CBC News advances.

Wright observed in his study of the European Union's online forum, Futurum that the "digital and linguistic divide" was a challenge in fulfilling

the criteria of inclusivity and accessibility.<sup>103</sup> Wright's observation connects to Raboy and Shtern's position that communication rights are not evenly distributed in Canada.<sup>104</sup> The CBC's mandate to cater to a diverse, multicultural society like Canada is arguably utopian. The broadcaster's inability to be fully accessible and inclusive is further hindered by the diverse and multi-layered social inequities with which various individuals, groups, and communities already grapple.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The patterns that emerged during selection, coding, and analyses of data include: a) in section one, the data analysis suggests that civility aided participants in staying focused on the topics of discussion; b) analysis of the criteria coded in section two shows that Habermas' expectations of an ideal public sphere, in relation to four of the six criteria, appear fairly consistently even though they were not entirely fulfilled; and c) the CBC News cannot entirely claim to be autonomous and inclusive. Behaviours associated with being "Canadian" (civil, calm, and considerate) seem dominant in most of the discussions. These behaviours could perhaps be credited for ensuring that participants are able to have constructive deliberations about politics on their public broadcasting forum.

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- <sup>1</sup> "Social Media: The Leaders' Speeches," CBC.ca, last modified May 2, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourcommunity/2011/05/social-media-the-leaders-speeches.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> "Your Answers: What Kind of Elections Do You Think Canada Votes 2011 Has Been?" CBC.ca, last modified May 1, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourcommunity/2011/05/your-answers-what-kind-of-election-do-you-think-canada-votes-2011-has-been.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> "Coalition Questions Return to Campaign," last modified April 21, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/21/cv-election-day27.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg, "Extending the Public Sphere through Cyberspace: The Case of Minnesota E-Democracy," *First Monday* 6, no. 3, 2001:2, accessed on November 1, 2010, <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/838/747>.
- <sup>5</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," accessed February 11, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/submissions.html>.
- <sup>6</sup> "Changes to user comments on CBCNews.ca," accessed February 11, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/contact/faqs/>.
- <sup>7</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," accessed February 11, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/submissions.html>. "On CBC platforms most of Your Content is moderated. That means that we read it before it is published to make sure it adheres to our Content Submission Guidelines. We will do our best to get it up promptly. We may edit Your Content and to ensure that Your Content is posted, we do ask that you follow these Content Submission Guidelines to create a thriving conversation. We moderate through a variety of moderation techniques including pre-moderation (before publishing), post-moderation (after publishing) and reactive moderation (in response to concerns)."
- <sup>8</sup> Julie Zhuo, "Where Anonymity Breeds Contempt," accessed February 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/opinion/30zhuo.html?pagewanted=print>. Zhuo traces its roots to the fourth century B.C., connecting it to Plato's work: "Plato touched no the subject of anonymity and morality in his parable of the ring of Gyges. That mythical ring gave its owner the power of invisibility [such that] even a habitually just man who possessed such a ring would become a thief, knowing that he couldn't be caught."
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> "Internet Protocol Address," accessed November 12, 2011, <http://mail.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1198107>. "Internet Protocol address is a series of numbers that identifies a digital device such as your computer. They work like your home address – they allow data to arrive at the correct Internet location." May I add that these numbers also enables law enforcement authorities to trace the owner/user of that computer to the location indicated on the IP#.
- <sup>11</sup> Brian Salter, "Upending Anonymity, These Days the Web Unmasks Everyone," accessed October 22, 2011, <http://mobile.nytimes.com/article?jsessionid=C4E45553E1580572CF70AEA2A0D05DDE.w5?a=806505&f=21>.
- <sup>12</sup> Amber Hildebrandt, "Election Misses Mark with Students," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 4, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/04/cv-election-youth-voter-turnout.html>.
- <sup>13</sup> "Harper Apologizes over Rally Screening," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 7, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/07/cv-election-harper-apology-1239.html>.

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<sup>14</sup> “Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 6, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/06/cv-election-lib-rural.html>.

<sup>15</sup> “Fantino Resignations Don’t ‘Sit Right,’ Ignatieff Says,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 14, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2011/04/14/ignatieff-fantino-vaughan.html>.

<sup>16</sup> “Harper ready to ‘hit the ground running,’ CBCNews.ca, last modified April 25, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/25/cv-election-harper-042511.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Laura Payton, “Leaders face Questions about their Futures,” CBCNews.ca, last modified May 1, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/05/01/cv-election-leaders-futures.html>.

<sup>18</sup> “Liberal Vote only way to get rid of Harper: Ignatieff,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 26, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/26/cv-election-ignatieff-vcr.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Green Party Leader first to stop in Calgary,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 19, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/story/2011/04/19/calgary-elizabeth-may-green-party.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Payton, “The House: The Twitter Election,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 2, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> “May, Lunn Rally Support in Final Campaign Push,” CBCNews.ca, last modified May 1, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/05/01/cv-election-saanich-gulf-islands.html>.

<sup>27</sup> “CBC in Nunavut blasted for nixing Election Forum,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 13, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/story/2011/04/13/nunavut-cv-election-cbc-forum.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 8, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/08/cv-election-day14.html>.

<sup>31</sup> “NDP Vows to Fight Gang Violence,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 7, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/07/cv-election-ndp-crime.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Amber Hildebrandt, “Cagefighter, Bartender, Musician among new MPs,” CBCNews.ca, last modified May 3, 2011,

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<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/05/03/cv-election-bartender-musician-cagefighter.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "Nunavut Ex-Premier Named Liberal Candidate," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 6, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> "Quebec NDP MPs Face Reality," CBCNews.ca, last modified May 4, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2011/05/03/new-ndp-mps-cp.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> "2 Bloc Members Support NDP," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 29, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2011/04/29/bloc-quebécois-members-support-ndp.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Arcade Fire Restores Anti-Harper Blog Post," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 8, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/08/cv-arcade-fire.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Laura Payton, "Ignatieff Underlines \$1B Family Care Plan," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 1, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/01/cv-election-ignatieff-care.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob Linnaa Jensen, "Public Spheres on the Internet: Anarchic or Government-Sponsored – A Comparison," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 26, no. 4, (2003): 357. Referencing Wilhelm (1998), and Hills and Hughes (1998).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>63</sup> Laura Payton, "NDP Deputy Leader Doubts Bin Laden Photos Exist," CBCNews.ca, last modified May 4, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2011/05/04/pol-mulcair-osama.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "Layton defends against 'Stop-Gap' Candidates," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 28, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> "Layton Turns Attacks Back on Rivals," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 27, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/27/cv-election-ndp-layton-winnipeg-1039.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> "Ignatieff Defends Foreign Voting Record," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 11, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/11/cv-election-day17.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109–142.

<sup>99</sup> "Harper Would Extend Fitness Tax Credit," CBCNews.ca, last modified April 3, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/03/cv-election-harper-ottawa.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Zizi Papacharissi, "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere," *New Media and Society* 4, no. 1, (2002): 11.

<sup>101</sup> Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Scott Wright, "A Virtual European Public Sphere? The Futurum Discussion Forum," *Journal of European Public Policy* 14, no. 8, (2007): 1167.

<sup>104</sup> Raboy and Shtern, "The Horizontal View," in *Media Divides*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010): 64.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Observations**

Generally, if the comments on the CBC News forum fulfill some of the criteria of the public sphere, perhaps it is an indication of the extent to which the forum participants are committed to having their voices heard. The first criterion – autonomy from state and economic power – is directly related to the CBC News forum. It is a condition that the forum needs to fulfill in order to foster a public sphere.

The next four criteria – exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, and sincerity – are for the forum participants to fulfill while engaging in deliberations. Citizens involved in civic engagement need to fulfill most if not all of these four criteria in order for their participation to equate to public sphere deliberations. The sixth criterion – discursive inclusion and equality – covers a broader range of issues, including access, inclusivity, and equality, which can be both internal and external to the forum.

#### **Section 1: Deliberative Dialogue**

This section reflects my observation based on the coding and analysis of the statements I assessed as On-topic, Off-topic, Flaming, and Moderated. In view of the high number of occurrence of on-topic utterances, I found the CBC News forum to be rather civil. More importantly, this perception of civility may indicate the forum's viability as a discursive arena that broadly

serves its purpose of encouraging deliberation among its users. This deliberation, however, may not be as critical as that which Habermas expects to appear in an ideal public sphere. The frequency of occurrence of off-topic statements (at half of on-topic statements) suggests that participants were half as likely to stay focused on the issues being discussed. On the flip-side, it appears that participants were half as likely to get side tracked as they were to stay focused on the issues.

In juxtaposing the data for on-topic and off-topic, one can infer that when participants stay focused on discussing issues, there tends to be less off-topic, disruptive, and distracting statements injected into the discussion. Some key examples are in article #6 (Election Misses Mark with Students<sup>1</sup>), article #9 (Harper Apologizes Over Rally Screening<sup>2</sup>), and article #18 (Liberals Target Faster Rural Internet Service<sup>3</sup>); they each have 23 occurrences of on-topic statements (in table 3.2). This pattern carried through even in assessing flaming, which is significantly low (7, 4, and 6 occurrences, respectively) in these three articles.

Flaming, which often derails conversations in online forums, was coded 180 times. This is fairly close to the amount of statements coded as off-topic. I consider this to be significant. Considering my perception of civility on the forum, it is useful to note that while there were attempts by some participants to upset other participants, rarely did those to whom such comments were directed engage with the flamer. In most cases, willfully ignoring the flamer(s) allowed the discussion to continue unabated and gave opportunities

for further deliberation undeterred by the unsavoury comments of some participants.

Papacharissi considers flaming a distraction in online forums and I agree with her position on this.<sup>4</sup> I observed that the inclusion of inflammatory statements in postings often diminished the import of the contribution as a whole. Other participants (or non-contributing observers) would first have to look past the objectionable material before they could assess the rest of the posting in order to determine what was useful information, deserving of attention, or worthy of response.

Another trend that emerged in the data is that where there were more on-topic statements, the off-topic statements tended to decline. On articles where there is a high degree of flaming, the off-topic statements declined as well. An exception is story #26 (Tories Vow to Eliminate Deficit Early<sup>5</sup>), which has 10 occurrences of flaming and an equally high 19 instances of on-topic utterances (in table 3.2). This is perhaps an indication of participants' sustained investment in the topic regardless of attempts to derail the discussion. I would speculate further that the CBC's first level moderation of comments is partly responsible for why there was a fairly high level of civility on the forum.

The second level moderation, which happens when participants flag a comment as offensive or inflammatory, may have also acted as a deterrent to participants who may otherwise engage in persistent flaming. Albrecht,<sup>6</sup> Dahlberg,<sup>7</sup> Jensen,<sup>8</sup> and Carlin et al.<sup>9</sup> all speak in favour of moderating online

discussions, Their position supports the CBC's current practice of moderating its online forum. However, the sometimes invisible or, in the case of CBC News, very visible, hand of a moderator in an online forum problematizes the notion of inclusivity.

## **Section 2: Canadian Ideal of Civility**

The four criteria coded in the quantitative analysis showed diverse dynamics in their occurrence in the comments and the ways that forum participants fulfilled some of the requirements. Statements coded as validity claims also featured elements of reflexivity in the same comment. Overall, some form of dialogue occurred in almost all the articles. There were a number of dogmatic claims made in some of the discussions, but most forum participants often refuted these claims by highlighting their inherent assumptions.

I also noticed repeat appearances of a few participants on some threads to make assertive statements that could be construed as dogmatic. Speaking to this kind of behaviour, Jensen argues that even when participants engage in contentious behaviour that could be labeled trolling, repeat appearances and frequent postings do not equate to a domination of the debates.<sup>10</sup> Rather, he suggests that a participant's repeat appearance on a particular thread is often a sign that the issues being discussed are of great interest to the participant, hence the commitment to discuss it exhaustively.

While some participants appeared to be reflexive in their postings, these reflections were very broad and more in line with the "larger social context"<sup>11</sup>

aspect of reflexivity. These reflections were barely critical and, often, the participants tended to make unsubstantiated remarks. I would suggest that this might be due to the fact that the form of the forum does not require such a particularly deep level of reflection regarding participants' personal assumptions and interests. In this context, questions arise as to whether or not: a) the cloak of anonymity afforded in an online forum necessarily makes people less reflexive than if they were in a face-to-face interaction or b) if this scanty occurrence is the manifestation of a gradual decline of reflexivity generally in public spheres. Moreover, since participants have the cloak of anonymity, most of them may have opted not to disclose any personal information or may have chosen to give false information. In cases such as these, the participants may assume that the information they give may not be considered an accurate representation of their views. Arguably, such participants are not necessarily presenting as their real-life selves when participating on these forums, hence they may not consider genuine reflexivity essential.

Various forms of ideal role taking occurred sporadically in most of the postings. For instance, some participants would copy a comment made by another participant, re-post the comment, and then give their opinion on it. Some participants prefaced their comments with another participant's handle. Another way that participants satisfied this criterion was to empathize with the topics being discussed in the articles that they commented upon. Overall, ideal role taking occurred 127 times in the 28 articles (in table 3.3). In their

efforts to be understanding, participants often brought additional information from other online sources to buttress their facts. In some instances, participants would invoke their past experiences to justify why a politician may have done something while other participants referred to third party incidents to buttress their arguments about the issues they support.

Papacharissi argues that rationality and compromise are difficult to attain in online discussions.<sup>12</sup> Albrecht also found that online deliberation is difficult in political processes.<sup>13</sup> These difficulties show up fairly consistently in the data collected from the CBC News forum. Participants who posted disruptive comments tended to do so without identifying themselves. The declaration of one's identity is not a prerequisite of participation. However, other participants managed this challenge of disruption by sometimes overlooking the attempts to disrupt and, instead, working collectively to redirect the discussion to the original issue. It is in this context that the ideal of civility overrides the occasional injection of inflammatory statements.

For the criterion of sincerity, participants were not particularly forthcoming. Most participants did not supply all information about themselves, which would have signaled their sincerity. However, they were quite consistent in focusing on how they are affected by the issues over which they were deliberating —up to and including regional and national electoral campaign promises. This suggests that a participant who may not signal his/her needs and desires may thus still clearly express his/her

intentions and interests. Most participants indicate their investment in issues by discussing in detail how the issues affect them.

Taken as a group, the four criteria of validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, and sincerity manifest 556 times in all of the 28 articles I reviewed from the CBC News forum. However, as stand-alone requirements, each criterion did not feature equally in each of the articles. Significantly, the emergent patterns of validity claims and sincerity appeared in almost equal amounts (151 and 154 incidences). So did reflexivity and ideal role taking at 124 and 127 respectively. Partial elements of each criterion and multiple aspects of various criteria appear in all the comments. These manifestations suggest that the forum does have the potential to foster a public sphere. When I doubled up the four criteria into two related groupings, the emerging pattern suggests that participants are mindful of their deliberative practices online. This mindfulness is a key factor of Habermas' conception of the public sphere. Habermas foregrounds interlocutors' behaviour in public discussion and privileges this over the issues being discussed.

### **Section 3: Challenge of Inclusivity and Equality**

The two criteria of autonomy from state and economic power as well as inclusion and equality lend themselves to qualitative analysis in the context of the form of the CBC News forum. The forum's ownership, by a publicly funded broadcaster that relies on government funding and its status as an electronic media reliant on commercial advertising, problematizes its potential to be fully autonomous and/or inclusive. However, Nancy Fraser

has argued that a platform does not need to be separate from the state or restricted from gainful economic affiliations for it to foster a public sphere.<sup>14</sup>

I support Fraser's position.

There were clear indications of attempts at inclusive behaviour among forum participants. However, the criterion of inclusivity has to be fulfilled by the forum too. For the CBC, inclusivity manifests both within and outside of the public glare. For instance, the forum is proactively moderated. Comments are reviewed prior to posting them and when participants flag some comments as offensive, such comments are deleted. One should ask though if the form of the forum generally lends itself to access for all who would like to participate. Moreover, how does moderation problematize the notion of inclusivity? Who gets to determine what should be posted, what is considered offensive, and which events to privilege over others?

Fraser observes that a practice of exclusivity emerged from Habermas' public sphere in its attempt to be inclusive.<sup>15</sup> This practice may have quietly crept into the CBC News forum. In Ryan's study of 19<sup>th</sup> century North American public spheres, she alludes to a historical exclusion of women.<sup>16</sup> Arthur Siegel discusses the CBC's mandate to foster a Canadian identity but the public broadcaster's role as agenda-setter compromises its ability to be all inclusive.<sup>17</sup> The CBC has the prerogative to select which events to cover, which stories to open for comments, and which comments to select as suitable for public debate and consumption. See Appendix E for the CBC's statement about how it moderates the forum. Participants are limited to



discussing only the articles that the CBC has published and opened to public comments.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, Fraser noticed restricted access based on gender, class, and race to the 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere discussed by Habermas.<sup>19</sup> This is similar to the access issues one may encounter on CBC News, especially if some people perceive the forum as a space for mostly elitist, masculine, middle-class men. Minority groups like the Aboriginals, women, racialized minorities, and those in the working class may not participate in the forum even though they have the means of access. Moreover, if those with partisan political interests are perceived to be in charge as moderators of the comments posted (or not) on the CBC News forum, people with opposing political views may feel sidelined, stifled, and/or silenced.

While still on the criteria of autonomy and inclusion, one also needs to ask if all citizens can possibly engage in deliberations on the forum, considering that the “digital divide” data suggests that some people still lack the language ability, technology, connectivity, and knowledge of political process needed for discussion in such a forum?<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it is unclear whether or not the CBC News forum can fulfill the requirements laid out in the criterion of autonomy from state and economic power when it may be encumbered by obligations that are connected to its reliance on public funding and advertising revenue.

Perhaps assessing the CBC News forum based on emerging theories of the public sphere will give it more viability as a tool of access. Rogers and

Marres have developed issues theory as a concept of neo-democracies, in contrast to the public sphere theory. They introduce the concept of “neo-democratic issue networks” as part of a developing body of literary work that promotes network theory as a way of analyzing issues and events on the Internet.<sup>21</sup> Micro-networks, such as the CBC News forum, as envisioned by Rogers and Marres, already exist online in diverse forms including, but not limited to, electronic blogs and forums. These networks are powered by Internet technology and they feed into a nation’s broader public sphere, as do offline forums.

### **Can the CBC Foster a Public Sphere for Canadians?**

I believe that the CBC can indeed foster a public sphere for Canadians. I would however caution that if one were to answer this question based on fulfilling *all* six criteria of the Habermasian public sphere *in toto*, then the fulfillment is, and perhaps may only ever be, partial. Even Habermas acknowledges that his concept of the public sphere is only an ideal and, in this context, the CBC News forum’s inability to fulfill all six criteria does not delegitimize its potential to foster a public sphere for Canadians.

Papacharissi’s observations concerning the fluidity of identity can be extended to a broader question about Canada’s communication climate and its public sphere.<sup>22</sup> Considering the continuing concern with the fluidity and instability of the Canadian identity (as discussed by Arthur Siegel<sup>23</sup> and

David Taras<sup>24</sup>), one might ask how a unified Canadian identity *online* could be created when it does not even exist *offline*?

When one considers the revisions and modifications that have been made to Habermas' initial theory by political scientists, feminist historians, and media scholars, then one can state firmly that the CBC News forum is fostering a public sphere for Canadians. Scholars like Fraser, Ryan, Dahlberg, (and later, Habermas himself) suggest that all of these six criteria do not have to be fulfilled by every platform set up for political deliberation. The measure of the CBC's success at fostering a discursive arena for Canadians is evident in its ability to offer the combination of a civil environment with a relatively open platform that allows anyone who has the means of access to participate in the deliberations. This success is measurable to a degree and it shows up in the data I produced. The structure of the forum, the forms of engagement by users, and the CBC's public statement about the forum's function and moderation are also key markers of an attempt to be open and accessible. Most of the participants bring a level of civility that emerges through a combination of their ability to be respectful of other people's opinion, relatively reflexive concerning their positions in the debates, and fairly sincere when deliberating on the issues.

One should recall that Raboy and Shtern argue that the digital divide is a social divide.<sup>25</sup> Their concerns about Canadians' right to communicate are germane in these debates. There is a need for nation-states to invest as much in human capital and capacity as they do in the penetration of technology.

The Canadian government has made great advances in communication technology (although these technologies need to penetrate even further into remote Northern Canadian communities). To complement these technological investments and make them more worthwhile, the federal government also needs to invest in building human capital (by investing more in capacity building in the areas of Internet use literacy for individuals) such that those who would like to engage in political discussion online can do so.

Habermas' initial model of the public sphere draws on face-to-face interaction as well as traditional media (print and electronic) as a means of facilitating dialogue. The format of the CBC News forum encourages those who have access and the motivation to engage in the discussions in the forums. The website also has a number of additional tools that one can review in order to gain further insights into the forum's functions (for example: first to last posts, highest rated posts, most active posts, and thumb up or down). The public broadcaster has provided all these tools for the forum participants' use, but if one does not have access or the motivation to engage in the forum, one cannot take advantage of these tools.

Papacharissi, Sciadas, and Raboy and Shtern remind us that Internet access is still a privilege. Their arguments are backed up by data from Statistics Canada. There is a need to make Internet access more affordable so that more people can have the opportunity to participate in such things as online forums. This may arguably aid in closing the unequal social gap that has been one of the challenges for participating in political-social life in the

country. Political science, history, social justice, and communication scholars, including Fraser, Landes, Eley, Barry, Raboy and Shtern, Papacharissi, and Albrecht all encountered this issue of social inequality in their research. Dahlgren also observed that a combination of access and political motivation is essential for there to be more citizen involvement in civic engagement online, though he also cautions that this citizen engagement cannot automatically fix whatever is broken in a nation's political system.<sup>26</sup> Like Dahlgren, Carlin et al. argue for a combination of access and motivation though they firmly advise that a moderator is essential in ensuring that flammers and disruptive comments do not derail deliberations.

If those who have access choose to, they can participate in the CBC News forum. Consequently, there is no need to “legislate” deliberation in public forums. Even in the very few comments I selected for analysis, it is obvious that those who have the tools of access and the willingness or motivation to engage in an online forum are indeed deliberating and do not need to be told to engage in their communities. If citizens are engaging in public sphere(s) of their own accord, then perhaps the two major questions for media scholars should be: who is engaging and why are others not engaging?

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the challenges of coding for public sphere elements in online forums (or any other forum, including print, broadcast, or face-to-face) is the

issue of overlap. A model needs to be developed that can usefully transform Dahlberg's six Habermasian criteria into a more fine grained model that could allow for an overlap between the elements of the criteria. It seems the overlap is a natural phenomenon rather than an artifact of the coding system. One has to find a means by which to set up a coding schedule that can account for such overlaps.

To further nuance the debates about the potential of the CBC News forum to foster a public sphere for Canadians, one could examine the forum on an ordinary day or season when there is no major national event (such as a federal election). Such an enquiry would be useful for determining if participants on the CBC News forum engage with issues as much as they did in the timeframe reviewed in my study. This could be developed into a comparative study that juxtaposes the results from the election season with that of a regular timeframe to see how deliberations on the forum may be different. A crucial question would be to determine whether or not participation and/or deliberation increases when (and if) participants perceive that something important is at stake.

There are some additional features that I noticed in the data that were not part of my initial plan for this study. These features could be examined when conducting future research. For instance, in some articles, participants made accusations (labeling the CBC as partisan, for example). Notably, in article #17 (Liberal Vote only way to Get Rid of Harper: Ignatieff<sup>27</sup>), participant *H8stupidpeople* referred to other participants as Conbots.<sup>28</sup> I find this

particularly interesting because it connects to the frequent accusation of liberal bias made against the CBC. To take advantage of this observation, an analysis could be conducted to see how the CBC News forum represents each of the federal political parties.

Another feature that is noteworthy is the high number of “agree” votes on specific comments in some articles when compared to others. One could examine this element of the forum for an understanding of which specific topics (and perhaps opinions) forum participants found useful and why. The review of such topics can be combined with an examination of some participants’ attempts to re-direct discussion after flaming has occurred on some threads.

An additional feature on the forum may aid in measuring redundancy or what could be termed secondary level flaming, in which case a participant posts the exact same comment twice. The comments feature inflammatory statements yet they are posted multiple times. Considering that the CBC claims to moderate some comments before they are posted to the forum, it is not clear why participants are allowed to repost such seemingly inflammatory comments. If taken up by other participants, the inflammatory statements could derail the discussion. This feature could be combined with a review of direct dialogue between two or more participants for a better understanding of the end result of such dialogues. Potentially, a study of these two elements can further give insights into the level of inclusivity displayed by participants towards each other.

### **Recommendations for Improving the Efficacy of Online News Forums**

Based on my overall interaction with the data, below are emergent guides that show what could facilitate or constrain constructive deliberation on online forums.

Factors that facilitate discussion:

- Asking specific questions tends to foster more reflexive postings.
- Asking questions aided participants to focus on single issues in relation to larger social contexts.
- Requirement of non-anonymity may bolster sincerity.
- When validity claims are combined with reflexivity, participants indicate awareness of cultural values and also situate their discussion within larger social contexts.

Factors that constrain discussion:

- Dogmatic assertions inhibit participants' efforts at ideal role taking.
- Participants acknowledge each other's stance, but sometimes this is done sarcastically.
- Participants engaging in ideal role taking are not necessarily consistent in their reflexivity.
- Participants do not tend to post multiple times in relation to a single article.



### **Limitations**

A limitation that I encountered in my study is the challenge of verifying the participants' demographic information, vis-à-vis age, gender, and political affiliations, and so on. Even though most participants provided some form of personal information in their profiles (typically their location) it is still not certain if the participants are necessarily who they claim to be or that they reside in the provinces indicated on their profiles. It is important to note, however, that demographic information is secondary in my study. My focus is to know if and how the CBC News can be viewed as fostering a public sphere for Canadians and not necessarily to argue that certain demographics are either well or poorly represented in, or engaging with, the forum.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

From a broad review of the CBC News forum, I noticed that there is a vibrant culture of public discourse occurring on the platform. I observed in the data that I produced a fair amount of reflexivity, ideal role taking, and sincerity on the part of the participants. Unfortunately, some people who have access are not engaging in online forums while those who do not have access are multi-disadvantaged by a lack of education, inability to afford the technology required, the cost of Internet connectivity, and perhaps an unwillingness to join online communities.

Contextually, the sample drawn from participants on CBC News is not necessarily representative of the entire population of people living in Canada,

since a lack of technological knowledge may prevent some citizens from accessing the CBC News online forum. The sample may also be unrepresentative inasmuch as people who do not like the CBC's form of news coverage (or perceive a bias against their own political beliefs) would not likely choose to participate in the CBC's forums.

Moreover, the forum I consulted is only the English language website whereas there is also a French language website and there are also diverse groups of people who speak other languages in Canada. This latter group may not participate in the English language forum due to language barriers. Consequently, I would caution against generalizing my results to the entire Canadian population, even though I have made attempts to work with fairly representative data.

The political process needs multiple spheres to ensure citizens' diverse ideas and views are represented. The criteria that Habermas requires deliberative forums to fulfill are not mutually exclusive and may not all be satisfied in every forum set up for deliberative and participatory democracy. The Internet potentially makes the public sphere more accessible because those who have access and choose to participate can engage with fellow citizens in online forums about issues that are of common interest to them.

To briefly return to the CBC's mandate as a public broadcaster, I observed that the services provided via its online discussion forums are inadequate. The CBC currently falls short in fulfilling part v (*contribute to shared national consciousness and identity*) and part vii (*reflect the*

*multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada*) of its mandate.<sup>29</sup> These two parts of the CBC's mandate are perhaps even more difficult to fulfill via an online forum in comparison to radio or television broadcast services. In his study, David Taras also suggests that the CBC was unable to fulfill these two parts of its mandate, especially part *vii*.

In the present study of the CBC News forum, I observed that rather than serving the multicultural communities that make up Canada, the online service is predominantly bilingual (English and French). It is obviously a major challenge for the CBC to be accessible to *all* Canadians via linguistic diversity but it may be a challenge worth taking up in order to bolster inclusivity and equality of access. Taras suggests further that CBC radio service did a good job in fostering strong ties between Canadians and their government. I would similarly suggest that the online community forums offered by the CBC have the potential to foster a similar relationship but that this potential is still very much in its infancy.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Albrecht, "Whose Voice is Heard in Online Deliberation? A Study of Participation and Representation in Political Debates on the Internet," *Information, Communication, and Society* 9, no. 1, (2006): 62-82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Linnaa Jensen, "Public Spheres on the Internet: Anarchic or Government-Sponsored – A Comparison," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 26, no. 4, (2003): 350.

<sup>9</sup> Diana B. Carlin, Dan Schill, David G. Levasseur, and Anthony S. King, "The Post-9/11 Public Sphere: Citizen Talk About the 2004 Presidential Debates," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8, no. 4, (2005): 622.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Siegel, *Politics and the Media in Canada: Second Edition* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1996), 182.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix E on the CBC's statements about arbitrary decisions on which stories to open for commenting.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> George Sciadas, "The Digital Divide in Canada," accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/56f0009x/56f0009x2002001-eng.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> In Jodi Dean, "Why the Net is not a Public Sphere," *Constellations* 10, no. 1, (2003): 97.

<sup>22</sup> Zizi Papacharissi, "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere," *New Media and Society* 4, no. 1, (2002): 11.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Siegel, *Politics and the Media in Canada: Second Edition* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1996), 182.

<sup>24</sup> David Taras, *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* (Peterborough: Broadview Press Limited, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Raboy and Shtern, "The Horizontal View," in *Media Divides*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010): 64.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation," *Political Communication* 22, (2005): 156.

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<sup>27</sup> “Liberal Vote Only Way to get rid of Harper: Ignatieff,” CBCNews.ca, last modified April 26, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadavotes2011/story/2011/04/26/cv-election-ignatieff-vcr.html>.

<sup>28</sup> “Conbots,” accessed October 22, 2011, <http://www.definition-of.net/conbot>. A conbot is “a type of weasel, usually seen in small burrows. It is known for its incredible ##ity and its amazing ability to be terrible at anything and everything it does. The Conbot is one of the few natural examples of a jackass of all trades. The singing of the Conbot is lethal to all those who hear it. Some examples: Frank was found dead after listening to a Conbot rendition of Hey Jude. Defined in Canada in 2009-2010 to describe Conservative party supporters who blindly (like robots) support the dictums and policies of the current Conservative leadership. These are persons who repeat catch phrases, simplistic policies without defending them with analysis or justification. They tend to go in droves to news web sites where they comment en masse to castigate opposing views without argument or defending their policies, using repetition and slurs to make their case. Some examples: Most Canadian Conservative cabinet ministers are Conbots. Everything for them is scripted by the Prime Minister's Office.”

<sup>29</sup> “Broadcasting Policy for Canada,” accessed November 5, 2011, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/B-9.01/page-2.html#h-4>.

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## Appendix A

### Full List of Articles Published During Data Selection Timeline

The numbers/titles highlighted indicate the articles I selected.

1. 'Desperate' hours in Ajax-Pickering fight - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
2. 'Ethnic costumes' email draws protest - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
3. 'Holocaust' comment not appropriate/ Layton - Politics - CBC News
4. 'No hope' NDP will govern/ 2008 WikiLeaks cable - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
5. 'Normal' for Tory ridings to get more cash/ Que. star candidate - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
6. 'Rise up' plea no change in strategy/ Ignatieff - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
7. 'Sad spectacle/' May on leaders' debate - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
8. 'Serious allegations' against Guergis revealed - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
9. 'Wrecking Ball' thrusts politics into arts spotlight - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
10. 2 Bloc members support NDP - Politics - CBC News
11. 2nd Liberal says residents targeted by harassing calls - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
12. 3 former MPs battle for N.S. seat - Politics - CBC News
13. Adrian Dix wins B.C. NDP leadership - Politics - CBC News
14. Advance poll numbers soar 34% from 2008 - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
15. AFN chief challenges parties to increase funding - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
16. All-candidate debates, without all the candidates - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
17. Allan Blakeney, former Sask. premier, dies - Politics - CBC News
18. Alward vows 'other actions' in Point Lepreau fight - Politics - CBC News
19. Anti-corruption squad targets Montreal/ Mayor livid - Politics - CBC News
20. Arcade Fire restores anti-Harper blog post - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
21. Auditor to make G8 report public in June - Politics - CBC News

22. Auditor's draft report alleges Tories misspent G8 funds - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
23. B.C. Green candidate resigns over Facebook 'rape' post - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
24. Bank of Canada slashes growth prediction - Politics - CBC News
25. Blogger films run-in with Lethbridge Tory - Politics - CBC News
26. Blue Jays, ballet, strippers seeking G20 compensation - Politics - CBC News
27. Boost CPP benefits, premiums/ Layton - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
28. Breach halts electronic pay stubs for federal workers - Politics - CBC News
29. Bureaucrats vetted ex-aide Carson/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
30. Cagefighter, bartender, musician among new MPs - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
31. Calgary Tory accuses opponents of collusion - Politics - CBC News
32. Can the Liberals rise up like Lazarus? - Politics - CBC News
33. Canada needs food policy/ group - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
34. Canada sending Aglukkaq to Arctic Council meet - Politics - CBC News
35. Canadians atwitter throughout debate - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
36. Canucks game bumps HST townhall meeting - Politics - CBC News
37. Carson cleared by low-level staffer/ PCO official - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
38. CBC defends voting tool that appears to lean Liberal | Decision 2011 | News | Ottawa Sun
39. CBC funding secure, heritage minister says - Politics - CBC News
40. CBC in Nunavut blasted for nixing election forum - Politics - CBC News
41. CBC News - The National - In Depth & Analysis - Interview with Elizabeth May
42. CBC.ca | The House | The Final Stretch
43. CBC.ca Player
44. CBC News.ca closes comments for poll blackout - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
45. Charest unveils \$80B plan for northern Quebec - Politics - CBC News
46. Child care/ What do you want in a national strategy? - Your Community
47. Chrétien pushes Rae as interim Liberal leader - Politics - CBC News
48. Chrétien urges Harper not to kill party subsidy - Politics - CBC News
49. CIA boss Panetta to replace Gates/ sources - Politics - CBC News
50. Coalition questions return to campaign - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
51. Conservative no show at Calgary East debate - Politics - CBC News

52. Conservatives quit over Vaughan health-care money - Politics - CBC News
53. Conservatives target Liberal-held Sydney - Politics - CBC News
54. Controversial G20 law to be repealed by Ontario - Politics - CBC News
55. Controversial Quebec Liberal to remain in race - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
56. Corporate tax cuts fail to help economy/ study - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
57. Councillor slams feds over G20 compensation - Politics - CBC News
58. Court won't hear G8 audit case before election - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
59. Court won't hear Greens' challenge before debates - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
60. Data breach fines sought by privacy watchdog - Politics - CBC News
61. Debate a snooze, students say - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
62. Debates to feature one-on-one exchanges - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
63. Dhalla asks auditor general to investigate Kenney - Politics - CBC News
64. Didn't know about all of Carson's convictions/ Harper - Politics - CBC News
65. Drug spending growth slows in Canada - Politics - CBC News
66. Duceppe calls Smith's spending comments 'stupid' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
67. Duceppe quits after BQ crushed in Quebec - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
68. Dunderdale takes risk with Harper pledge - Politics - CBC News
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72. Election victory and tragic personal loss for Tory MP - Politics - CBC News
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79. F.N. chiefs launch voting campaign - Politics - CBC News

80. Fantino resignations don't 'sit right,' Ignatieff says - Politics - CBC News
81. Fiery Chrétien rallies Liberal faithful - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
82. Final campaign push before royal wedding - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
83. Fined blogger won't flout election blackout - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
84. Five Most Commented Stories on CBC.ca as of March 31
85. Fraser doubts she'll find who leaked G8 report - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
86. Fraser launches probe into report leaks - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
87. French debate stirs up Que. constitution issue - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
88. Gatineau NDP candidate decries personal attacks - Politics - CBC News
89. Green campaign 'about winning seats,' May says - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
90. Green Party leader first to stop in Calgary - Politics - CBC News
91. Green Party rated best on reform proposals - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
92. Greens ask Australians to remove video - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
93. Greens pledge carbon tax, corporate tax hike - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
94. Group sues auditor general to release G8 report - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
95. Group tries to make monarchy an election issue - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
96. Hamilton 'vote mob' a 'victory' for students - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
97. Harassing calls could be spoofed, company says - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
98. Harassing calls spread to Ottawa - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
99. Harper 'tossed me under a bus'/ Guergis - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
100. Harper apologizes over rally screening - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
101. Harper campaign screening 'un-Canadian'/ Ignatieff - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
102. Harper continues push for majority - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
103. Harper defends aide over interference questions - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News



104. Harper dismisses reports of F-35 cost hikes - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
105. Harper faces cabinet gaps - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
106. Harper has ignored health-care problems/ Layton - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
107. Harper is 'lying,' Duceppe repeats - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
108. Harper majority may be one-hit wonder/ study - Politics - CBC News
109. Harper makes no mention of Lepreau on N.B. visit - Politics - CBC News
110. Harper ready 'to hit the ground running' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
111. Harper reaffirms vow to scrap gun registry - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
112. Harper rebuffs talk of government 'hypotheticals' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
113. Harper says he won't reopen abortion debate - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
114. Harper should release G8/G20 costs/ opposition - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
115. Harper touts Tory anti-crime agenda - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
116. Harper vows 'modest' cuts but offers few details - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
117. Harper vows foreign credentials reform in GTA stop - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
118. Harper vows to end party subsidies - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
119. Harper won't speculate on political future - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
120. Harper would extend fitness tax credit - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
121. Harper, Ignatieff pitch to North - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
122. Harper/ Majority win turns page on uncertainties - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
123. Health care top Atlantic Canada issue/ poll - Politics - CBC News
124. House won't return for at least 2 weeks - Politics - CBC News
125. Ignatieff appointed to U of T's Massey College - Politics - CBC News
126. Ignatieff blasts \$11B 'hole' in Tory platform - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
127. Ignatieff calls student aid plan revolutionary - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

128. Ignatieff commits to stay as Liberal leader - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
129. Ignatieff confirms Lower Churchill support - Politics - CBC News
130. Ignatieff defends foreign voting record - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
131. Ignatieff goes ahead with Sikh interview - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
132. Ignatieff kicks off health transfer pledge blitz - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
133. Ignatieff mocks Harper's Lower Churchill promise - Politics - CBC News
134. Ignatieff pitches \$500 million a year for child care - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
135. Ignatieff pledges meeting on health care - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
136. Ignatieff promises ferry for Yarmouth - Politics - CBC News
137. Ignatieff promises flood-relief plans - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
138. Ignatieff quits as Liberal leader - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
139. Ignatieff slams Harper over ex-aide's convictions - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
140. Ignatieff underlines \$1B family care plan - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
141. Ignatieff vows to 'stand and fight' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
142. Ignatieff wants Afghan documents released - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
143. Ignatieff, Harper bring campaigns east - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
144. Ignatieff, Harper in war of words over minority scenarios - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
145. Ignatieff's Liberals lose Official Opposition status - Politics - CBC News
146. Israel a key election issue in York Centre - Politics - CBC News
147. Judicial recounts expected in 2 ridings - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
148. Keddy removes sign from federal display - Politics - CBC News
149. Kent decries candidate's Tamil Tiger support - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
150. Layton defends against 'stop-gap' candidates - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

151. Layton defends inexperienced Quebec caucus - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
152. Layton defends vacationing candidate - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
153. Layton draws heat in campaign's final days - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
154. Layton must clarify constitutional comments/ BQ - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
155. Layton open to constitutional talks with Quebec - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
156. Layton pitches veterans' benefits plan - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
157. Layton pledges streamlined federal aid for farms - Politics - CBC News
158. Layton promises jobs for N.B. - Politics - CBC News
159. Layton sees growing Quebec support, targets Liberals - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
160. Layton turns attacks back on rivals - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
161. Layton unveils own form of 'attack' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
162. Layton vows not to meddle in Bank of Canada rates - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
163. Layton vows to 'fight like hell for your jobs' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
164. Layton wants absent MPs fined - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
165. Layton warns of Tory, Liberal service cuts - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
166. Layton would help hire more doctors, nurses - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
167. Layton would slash oilsands subsidies - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
168. Leaders appeal to families, small business - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
169. Leaders back on campaign after fiery French debate - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
170. Leaders face questions about their futures - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
171. Leaders make debate pitches, trade barbs - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
172. Leaders sharpen messages on final day - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
173. Leaders' debate shapes up to be lively - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

174. Leaders' debate/ live coverage, online chat - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
175. Leaders' debate/ Send us your question - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
176. Leaders' debates set without May - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
177. Leaders' French debate bumped by NHL playoffs - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
178. Liberal candidate apologizes for sex assault comments - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
179. Liberal fired for pamphlet trashing - Politics - CBC News
180. Liberal vote only way to get rid of Harper/ Ignatieff - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
181. Liberal-NDP merger possible, senator says - Politics - CBC News
182. Liberals call for probe into Tory G8 spending - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
183. Liberals could still govern if Harper wins minority/ Ignatieff - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
184. Liberals field questions about future leaders - Politics - CBC News
185. Liberals have 'skeletons in closet,' too/ Wallin - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
186. Liberals lay out \$8B 'families' platform - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
187. Liberals ready for final push/ Ignatieff - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
188. Liberals say they'll change health-care ad quote - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
189. Liberals should drop ex-judge/ Tories - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
190. Liberals target faster rural Internet service - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
191. Liberals turf Que. candidate over aboriginal comments - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
192. Liberals will push to 'last bell'/ Ignatieff - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
193. Liberals would fund 4 years university for veterans - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
194. Liberals, Tories focus on Bloc ridings - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
195. Libya debate would liven up 'boring' election/ Hillier - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
196. London student not satisfied with Harper meeting - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

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198. Massage 'clinic' didn't raise suspicions/ Layton - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
199. May not welcome in leaders' debates/ networks - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
200. May, Lunn rally support in final campaign push - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
201. McGuinty says provinces need 10-year health accord - Politics - CBC News
202. Mock election aims to make voting 'viral' among youth - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
203. Montreal mayor fires comptroller in spying scheme - Politics - CBC News
204. MPs embarrassed by party theatrics/ study - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
205. Municipalities urge parties to show plans - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
206. N.L. Tories target Ignatieff over seal hunt - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
207. Native candidates stir northern voter interest - Politics - CBC News
208. NDP ad attacked Liberal Casey - Politics - CBC News
209. NDP cap-and-trade plan would hike gas prices/ Pembina - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
210. NDP deputy leader doubts bin Laden photos exist - Politics - CBC News
211. NDP platform pledges 'immediate action' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
212. NDP pledges to fight elder abuse - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
213. NDP prioritizes ships over jets - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
214. NDP proposes help for family caregivers - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
215. NDP set to work its Quebec network/ Layton - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
216. NDP supports Lower Churchill - Politics - CBC News
217. NDP targets Ignatieff on abortion issue - Reality Check - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
218. NDP to unveil balanced budget platform - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
219. NDP urges Elections Canada to add advance poll - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
220. NDP vows to fight gang violence - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

221. NDP's Layton becomes Official Opposition leader - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
222. NDP's Mulcair clarifies bin Laden comments - Politics - CBC News
223. Never been to riding, rookie NDP MP admits - Politics - CBC News
224. No charges in Layton massage parlour leak - Politics - CBC News
225. No monarchy succession debate for Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
226. No more Canadian jets to Libya mission/ Harper - Politics - CBC News
227. No more talk of NDP-Liberal merger/ Broadbent - Politics - CBC News
228. No plans to topple Tory minority/ Layton - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
229. Not our job to restrict rally access/ RCMP - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
230. Nunavut ex-premier named Liberal candidate - Politics - CBC News
231. Obama dishes it out to Trump - Politics - CBC News
232. Ottawa's F-35 jet cost figures way off/ U.S. analyst - Politics - CBC News
233. Ousted MPP Sterling says he won't vote Liberal - Politics - CBC News
234. Parizeau calls on PQ to rally behind Bloc - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
235. Parties wage battle of convenience for middle class - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
236. Parties, Laureen Harper focus of WikiLeaks cables - Politics - CBC News
237. Parties, leaders spin victory from debate performance - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
238. PM returns to Ottawa after majority win - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
239. PMO warned ethics watchdog on Carson - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
240. Point Grey byelection race heats up - Politics - CBC News
241. Polls closed after dramatic election campaign - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
242. Prominent candidates/ Duceppe, Ignatieff, Cannon defeated - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
243. Proud of son, but he's wrong/ MP's mom - Politics - CBC News
244. Provinces seek clarity on health funding - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

245. Public servant slams response to harassment claim - Politics - CBC News
246. Public servants fear layoffs amid Tory majority - Politics - CBC News
247. Put NDP under the microscope, Ignatieff says - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
248. Que. take on Tory hydro pledge unwarranted/ Dexter - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
249. Quebec language rights first order of business/ Layton - Politics - CBC News
250. Quebec NDP MPs face reality - Politics - CBC News
251. Quebec plans for new Champlain Bridge - Politics - CBC News
252. Quebec woman becomes instant star after debates - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
253. Questions raised about rookie NDP MP's papers - Politics - CBC News
254. Record number of women elected - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
255. Rookie NDP MP Brosseau cleared by Elections Canada - Politics - CBC News
256. Rules prevent release of G8 report/ Fraser - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
257. Should Canada have a cap-and-trade system? - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
258. Sites, firm measure leaders' Twitter 'reach' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
259. Social media/ The campaigns' final pushes - Your Community
260. Social media/ The leaders' speeches - Your Community
261. Soldier's widow fights taxes on survivor benefits - Politics - CBC News
262. Soudas dogged by new influence questions - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
263. Strategic voting groups have lofty goals - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
264. Support for independent swells in Ottawa riding - Politics - CBC News
265. Surging NDP support changes campaign dynamic - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
266. Swift N.L., Que. reaction to Harper's hydro endorsement - Politics - CBC News
267. T.O. Tory staffer makes 'ethnic costume' rally appeal - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
268. Tax-free savings limit would double/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

269. The condo factor/ Voters in the sky - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
270. The House/ The Twitter election - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
271. Top court won't hear Tory appeal over campaign GST - Politics - CBC News
272. Tories compiled Harper's most controversial quotes - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
273. Tories defunding Planned Parenthood, MP says - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
274. Tories hope to make inroads with 'ethnic vote' - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
275. Tories open to Afghan records release - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
276. Tories raise stakes on Lower Churchill warnings - Politics - CBC News
277. Tories take aim at surging Layton - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
278. Tories under fire over leaked G8 report - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
279. Tories used praise for Liberals to defend summit costs/ Fraser - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
280. Tories vow to eliminate deficit early - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
281. Tories would back Lower Churchill/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
282. Toronto Mayor Ford endorses Harper - Politics - CBC News
283. Tory backbencher sits on sidelines - Politics - CBC News
284. Tory candidate's access to Kenney questioned - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
285. Tory hopeful's stations played Tamil Tiger 'propaganda'/ expert - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
286. Tory majority key to stopping sovereigntists/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
287. Tory majority looks 'elusive'/ EKOS - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
288. Tory MP takes back census remarks - Politics - CBC News
289. Tory strategist dumped over bogus Ignatieff photo - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
290. Troops will help battle Man. flooding/ PM - Politics - CBC News
291. Trudeau 'undecided' about Liberal leadership - Politics - CBC News
292. Trust Tories with the economy, not NDP/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News



293. U of Guelph ballots valid/ Elections Canada - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
294. U.S. border deal at risk without majority/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
295. U.S. cables dissect Canada's leaders/ WikiLeaks - Politics - CBC News
296. Vancouver injection site becomes election issue - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
297. VIDEO/ Martin and Ignatieff rally Edmonton - Politics - CBC News
298. Volpe says supporters targeted by call campaign - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
299. Vote Compass passes 1 million mark - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
300. Vote Compass passes 1 million mark - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News 2
301. Vote Compass/ Taxes — the parties' positions - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
302. Vote Compass/ What we've learned so far - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
303. Vote Compass/ Your reactions - Your Community
304. Wall slams Ignatieff over post-election musings - Politics - CBC News
305. Website tries to make voting sexy - Politics - CBC News
306. Western Arctic incumbent unfazed by rival bids - Politics - CBC News
307. WESTON/ Majority rules — just about everything - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
308. White House releases Obama birth certificate - Politics - CBC News
309. Won't try to govern from 2nd place/ Harper - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
310. Your Answers/ What kind of election do you think Canada Votes 2011 has been? - Your Community
311. Your federal election hashtag guide - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News
312. YouTube pulls Harper Imagine clip - Canada Votes 2011 - CBC News

## Appendix B

### Codebook

Code	Definition	
N1	On-topic	Any comments made on any of the articles that stays close to the topic heading of the section under which it is posted. If the topic heading for a particular section is healthcare for instance, as long as the comment is closely linked to healthcare, then the post is considered on-topic.
N2	Off-topic	This is the opposite of on-topic comments. Off-topic comment is any comment made that veers off the course of the topic heading under which it is made. The post may be expressing concerns about other such topics like economic or energy concerns, but as long as it is made under a topic heading that is unrelated to either of these concerns, then it is considered off-topic.
N3	Flaming	Any comment that is made with no relevance to any of the key issues highlighted under the topic of the posting, especially if the post could create hostility and derail the discussion. If a comment contains derogatory terms and insults directed at other participants, without any constructive contribution to the topic heading or other concerns in the article, then it is considered a comment with potential to infuriate, distract, and derail the thread.
N4	Reflexivity	Participants must critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.
N5	Ideal Role Taking	Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the other's perspective. This requires a commitment to an ongoing dialogue with difference in which interlocutors respectfully listen to each other.

N6	Sincerity	Each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information – including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires – as relevant to the particular problem under consideration.
L7	Autonomy from state and economic power	Discourse must be based on the concerns of citizens as a public rather than driven by the media of money and administrative power that facilitate the operations of the market and state.
N8	Exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims	Deliberation involves engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticizable – are open to critique rather than dogmatically asserted.
L9	Discursive inclusion and equality	Every participant affected by the validity claims under consideration is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever. Inclusion can be limited by inequalities from outside of discourse – by formal or informal restrictions to access. It can also be limited by inequalities within discourse, where some dominate discourse and others struggle to get their voices heard.
M11	Moderated	Indicates appearance of a moderator in a thread of comments.

**Appendix C****Ethical Consideration****Email confirmation from Brock University Research Ethics Board**

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Date: Tue, 29 Mar 2011 18:28:55 +0000 [03/29/2011 02:28:55 PM EDT]

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From: Lori Ann Walker <lwalker@brocku.ca>

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To: 'Jumoke Isekeije' <ji06ty@badger.ac.brocku.ca>

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Subject: RE: Ethics Approval for Online Data

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Hi Jumoke,

If all of the information that you are using is publicly accessible then you do not need to go through the REB. If there are messages on the sites disallowing research or you need permissions to access information (group membership that is not open to the public) then you would need to submit an application to the REB.

I have a feeling that the information you are looking at is in the public realm but you can tell me if it isn't and we can go from there.

Lori

## Appendix D

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### How is Your Content Moderated?

On CBC platforms most of Your Content is moderated. That means that we read it before it is published to make sure it adheres to our Content Submission Guidelines. We will do our best to get it up promptly. We may edit Your Content and to ensure that Your Content is posted, we do ask that you follow these Content Submission Guidelines to create a thriving conversation. We moderate through a variety of moderation techniques including pre-moderation (before publishing), post-moderation (after publishing) and reactive moderation (in response to concerns).

Contributors to CBC.ca start with "Standard" status, meaning they are subject to pre-moderation. As of April 2010, we added a new status called "Trusted". Contributors with "Trusted" status by-pass pre-moderation, their submissions are posted immediately.

A contributor becomes a "Trusted" member of the CBC.ca online community by being a frequent contributor with a good reputation (i.e: almost all submissions by the member fall within our Content Submission Guidelines and are suitable for publishing).

#### What if I see content I don't like?

If you think someone else's content violates the Content Submission Guidelines, you have an opportunity to respond by clicking on the "Reporting" link associated with the content and explaining the problem (i.e. Report Abuse). We'll investigate.

### Comments

#### How do I comment?

Comments are solicited at the bottom of most news stories, blogs and other CBC/Radio-Canada content. In most cases, you need to log in or create an account before commenting. You can create an account in our Member Centre.

#### What about including personal information in comments?

If sharing more about yourself is relevant to Your Content that you are submitting, go ahead. You can also update your profile and username at any time. Any updates will be retroactive and associated with all Your Content submitted in the past. We do not accept comments containing phone numbers or email addresses since it is private information.

<http://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/submissions.html>

## Appendix E

### Changes to User Comments on CBCNews.CA

In response to your feedback, we have made changes to make commenting on our news stories a better experience.

#### 1. Approving and recommending comments

It can be a challenge to provide an open space for Canadians to debate and share their opinions on the news, and maintain that space as one where people feel safe and comfortable. As a result of your feedback, we have tightened up our submission guidelines. More borderline comments are now not published.

As always, if you see a comment that you feel contravenes our guidelines, click on the “report abuse” link below the comment. Our moderators will give the flagged comment a second review. We have recently added a link to our submissions policy beside the “report abuse” link.

If you simply disagree with the viewpoint expressed, you can now give it a “thumbs down.” We have reworked the existing “recommend a comment” functionality in response to user requests for the ability to “un-recommend” a comment.

#### 2. When guidelines aren’t followed

We have always banned the most problematic users who fail to follow our guidelines, but we have also started to use a temporary suspension, or “time out.” For users that fail to follow the guidelines, we block their input to the site for 3 business days by rendering it invisible to other users. We’ll still see any new posts, and can decide to lift the suspension after the “time out” period, or to ban the user.

#### 3. When comments are disabled on news articles

Lastly, we do want to acknowledge that not all types of articles will include comments.

When we do an article on a death of an individual, we have seen comments submitted that are needlessly hurtful to the family of the deceased. To respect their loss, we disable commenting on these articles. We also disable commenting on court proceedings that involve a publication ban, and articles related to abductions, as we don’t want to inadvertently publish any input that would be helpful for the abductors.

The CBC.ca moderators are working on more improvements to our commenting section that we hope to launch over the coming year. For more details, see Your Best Stuff.

<http://www.cbc.ca/contact/faqs/>